

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and fiftieth plenary meeting

Held via videoconference on Thursday, 21 January 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium)



The President: I call to order the 1550th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Dear colleagues, before we proceed with the order of business today, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the new colleagues who have assumed their responsibilities at the Conference. This morning, we actually have three new colleagues with us. I would like to welcome: His Excellency Mr. Lazhar Soualem of Algeria, His Excellency Mr. Moe Tun of Myanmar and His Excellency Mr. Juan Antonio Quintanilla Román, Ambassador of Cuba. On behalf of my own Government and on behalf of the Conference, I would like to assure you all of our full cooperation and support in your new assignments.

As announced at the end of the plenary meeting on Tuesday afternoon, I now wish to proceed with the speakers on our list of speakers. We will start with the rights of reply which we could not hear on Tuesday, and the first speaker to whom I give the floor is the delegate of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Ms. Hroneska (North Macedonia): Thank you very much. First, let me congratulate you on your assumption of your role as President and wish you a successful presidency. Our delegation is pleased to participate as an observer in the work of the Conference on Disarmament in 2021.

Mr. President, with reference to the statement of the delegation of Bulgaria, the delegation of North Macedonia would like to make the following statement:

Based on the principle of equality and sovereign rights of States, both names of my country – the full “Republic of North Macedonia” and the short “North Macedonia” – are equally valid and should be used in conformity with the established rules and practice of all international organizations, above all the United Nations, and in line with the information contained in the United Nations Terminology Reference System (UNTERM). The Republic of North Macedonia and North Macedonia are the full and the short forms of the name of a sovereign State as a political entity in international relations. Therefore, the request to use only the full name of my country in Conference on Disarmament documents runs contrary to the principles and practice mentioned above.

We would also like to use this opportunity to recall the importance we attach to full and consistent implementation, in good faith, of the spirit and the letter of the Treaty on Good-Neighbourly Relations between our two States. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of North Macedonia. I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also to exercise his right of reply.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. I have taken the floor to exercise my delegation’s right of reply to the United States representative, whose tone and tirade against other States, including my beloved country Iran, reflected his own empty character and the pathetic Administration he deservedly was representing until yesterday. It is quite interesting that the first meeting of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament coincided with the last day of one of the worst United States Administrations ever. However, it was certainly not a good omen for the Conference’s first day to have to listen to a psychopathic warmonger who used his last day in office to poison this body and to dictate to his successors how to kick-start their term. Good riddance to them. Mr. Marshall Billingslea and his pathetic bosses are gone for good, but the responsibility of the United States for the outgoing Administration’s outrageous criminal acts, its extremely malign policies and its brutal crimes against humanity remains. The malicious legacy may not disappear easily – the question is whether newcomers will be willing to take lessons from the past four years and reverse the terrible consequences of their predecessors’ misconduct and misbehaviour.

Mr. President, when people are lying, they love to blame. A narcissist projects without being provoked. These two assertions explain exactly the case of the speakers who took pride in being deputies to a person whose emptiness and lack of character are revealing, the same person who once said proudly: “I was CIA director – we lied, we cheated, we stole, we had entire training courses ... It reminds you of the glory of the American experiment.” I think that we should admit that Pompeo’s deputy has been a very talented apprentice, as he showed how well he mimicked his boss in telling lies and uttering nonsense – birds of a feather flock

together. What he said about Iran was so absurd and so vindictive that it represented only the total failure of his and his boss's campaign of so-called maximum pressure against the Iranian nation. However, it was a good reminder to Conference members that the malign United States campaign against the Conference continued up until the last day of the former Administration's disastrous term in office. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We will now return to the list of speakers. I first give the floor to Indonesia, which will take the floor on behalf of the Group of 21. Ambassador, again, I regret that we could not hear you on Tuesday, 19 January.

Ms. Werdaningtyas (Indonesia): Thank you, Mr. President, including of course for your kind words. Now, to begin, on behalf of the Group of 21, we would like to congratulate you and Belgium for assuming the role of the first President of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. We wish you every success in your presidency and in starting our work this year.

We welcome all six Presidents who will take on the presidency of the Conference in 2021 and are looking forward to working with them as they discharge their responsibilities. Cognizant of the challenge in the global health situation and its impact on the Conference, the Group would like to reiterate its flexibility with regard to the temporary meeting arrangements, while underscoring the importance of full respect for the rules of procedure.

Mr. President, the Group reaffirms the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation and expresses its determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in these areas. The Conference on Disarmament is the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum mandated by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and the Group emphasizes the importance of preserving it by strengthening the nature, role and mandate of this body.

We underscore the need to redouble our efforts in order to reinforce and revitalize the Conference and to preserve its credibility through the resumption of substantive work including negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The Group of 21 reaffirms its working paper on nuclear disarmament contained in document CD/2192 and all other working papers submitted to the Conference in 2020.

The Group reiterates the urgency for the Conference to execute its mandate as set out by the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and also to adopt and implement a balanced and comprehensive programme of work on the basis of its agenda, while taking into account the security interests of all States and dealing with, inter alia, the core issues, particularly nuclear disarmament, in accordance with the rules of procedure, including the rule of consensus. The Group encourages you, Mr. President, to spare no efforts and to continue conducting comprehensive consultations with all delegations to the Conference to achieve this goal.

To conclude, Mr. President, we wish to reiterate the commitment of the Group of 21 to the work of the Conference. Please be assured of the Group's support for your presidency. I thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Indonesia, who spoke on behalf of the Group of 21. I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Muhamad (Malaysia): Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin by wishing a happy new year to all colleagues and congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption as the first President of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation commends the efforts that you and your predecessors have undertaken thus far in steering the work of the Conference, especially during these challenging times. Let me assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support in your endeavours to move the Conference forward and to begin substantive work.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all new colleagues who have arrived in Geneva and taken up their duties in the area of disarmament. We look forward to working with all of you.

Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, the year 2020 was indeed difficult for all of us. Not only were we faced with major environmental challenges, such as wildfires, severe floods, storms, crop infestations and searing heat, but the world was also struck by the COVID-19 pandemic. This lethal and indiscriminate virus has affected every country and every aspect of our daily lives. This Conference is no exception. Last year, we witnessed the suspension of the plenary meetings for more than three months due to this unprecedented situation. Subsequently, in-person meetings were halted, and hybrid meetings were further scaled down due to financial constraints. Regrettably, we concluded the 2020 session with another year of failure and paralysis – paralysis that is now decades long.

While there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted our work, we are nonetheless hopeful that, by building on the lessons learned in 2020, this year can be better. We need to quickly adapt to this “new normal”. This pandemic cannot be another reason for the Conference to remain in limbo. We must end the status quo. It is now more pertinent than ever for the Conference to uphold and live up to its mandate as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. In achieving this, we must work together, reinforce our efforts and demonstrate greater political will, flexibility and a genuine desire to reach an agreement on the programme of work. It has often been said that the Conference cannot work in a vacuum, and it needs to take into account geostrategic practices and security considerations.

In 2021, we will reach several important milestones in the field of disarmament and arms control – there will be, to mention but a few, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) of 2010, which is due to expire on 5 February 2021, the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is now slated for August 2021, and the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, which is tentatively scheduled to take place this year. We must redouble our efforts to achieve a positive outcome from the Conference on Disarmament so that it could have a positive ripple effect on other related conferences and meetings.

Mr. President, Malaysia remains committed to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons – hence, on 30 September 2020 we became the forty-sixth country to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We are proud to be part of this historic moment and look forward to the entry into force of this Treaty tomorrow, 22 January 2021. As conveyed by our Foreign Minister, it is our hope that the Treaty will change the nuclear disarmament discourse from one dominated by the nuclear-weapon and nuclear-armed States to one which is more democratic, equitable and in which all States have an equal voice.

Malaysia regrets that the Conference started its session last Tuesday with another non-substantive dispute. We wish to take this opportunity to express our views regarding the participation of non-member States in the work of this Conference. It has been our principled position to support multilateralism, and thus we welcome the participation of all States in this Conference. We urge all member States to exercise flexibility and focus on efforts to advance the substantive work of this Conference. We recall that the report of the Conference on Disarmament to the General Assembly of the United Nations which was adopted in September 2020 encourages the United Nations Secretariat, in coordination with the secretariat of the Conference, to continue its work on developing contingency plans to allow the Conference to maintain its work in extraordinary situations, while providing greater financial transparency to the member States. We consider this matter of equal importance in achieving our collective goals and a successful outcome of the Conference. We look forward to hearing updates regarding this matter in due time.

To conclude, let me reaffirm the commitment of Malaysia to general and complete disarmament of weapons of mass destruction. My delegation remains ready to work with you and other members towards achieving a positive and successful outcome for this Conference. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Malaysia and now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Mr. President, members of the secretariat, colleagues, at the outset, let me convey my delegation's best wishes for the new year to all.

It is a great pleasure for India to see Belgium preside over the Conference on Disarmament. India and Belgium enjoy excellent bilateral relations and have been working closely at various multilateral forums, including the Conference. We assure you of the full support of the Indian delegation in the discharge of your responsibilities. I would also like to place on record our sincere appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Yuri Ambrazevich of Belarus, for the able manner in which he conducted the work of the Conference. I thank Dr. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, for her valuable remarks at the Conference earlier in the session.

I would like to welcome our new colleagues in the Conference: Ambassador Lazhar Soualem of Algeria, Ambassador Mustafizur Rahman of Bangladesh, Ambassador Yuri Sterk of Bulgaria, Ambassador Juan Quintanilla Román of Cuba, Ambassador Salomon Eheth of Cameroon, Ambassador Grata Werdaningtyas of Indonesia, Ambassador Moe Tun of Myanmar, Ambassador C.A. Chandraprema of Sri Lanka, Ambassador Héctor Constant Rosales of Venezuela, as well as you, Mr. President. India associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, we commence the 2021 session of the Conference against the backdrop of an unprecedented year for humanity in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple challenges to global peace and security, and particularly to the disarmament architecture, during recent times serve as a constant reminder of our responsibility to uphold the mandate of the Conference to negotiate legally binding instruments which, while addressing challenges to international security, will also safeguard vital national security interests.

India is committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament and has called for complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a step-by-step process, as also outlined in the working paper on nuclear disarmament it submitted to the Conference on Disarmament in 2007. India attaches high importance to the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, drawing its mandate from the consensus Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and reaffirmed most recently in General Assembly resolution 75/83. India hopes for an early start of substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament, in keeping with its mandate as a negotiating forum. Without diminishing the priority we attach to disarmament, India has supported the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference of a fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein, which remains the most suitable basis for the commencement of negotiations, as also endorsed by the Group of Governmental Experts on a fissile material cut-off treaty and the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group.

However, despite considerable efforts in the past, the Conference has not been able to snap out of its long-standing stalemate and has failed to adopt a programme of work by consensus for more than a decade now. It is important that we work together and preserve the effectiveness and credibility of the Conference to negotiate multilateral disarmament instruments and lay to rest any scepticism about its efficacy.

Effective multilateralism is the need of the hour and requires participation by all interested States. Thus, it becomes important that no State be denied the opportunity to participate in the work of the Conference. It is provided for in the rules of the procedure itself and denying such an opportunity has the potential to undermine the collective spirit of working together to achieve our shared objectives.

Mr. President, rule 28 of the Conference on Disarmament's rules of procedure calls upon the Conference, on the basis of its agenda and at the beginning of its annual session, to establish a programme of work. We appreciate the early start you have given us through the circulation of the draft programme of work for the Conference's 2021 session and commend the efforts you have made in holding extensive consultations with member States in this regard. We will share our views on the draft programme of work during the upcoming plenary meeting.

The new year brings new possibilities and renewed opportunities to work together and bridge our divergences. We are confident that under your expert leadership and guidance, the Conference on Disarmament will achieve a consensus on a programme of work for this year. India stands ready to support your endeavour, as well as those by the subsequent presidencies during the year. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India and now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. It is my pleasure to congratulate you again on your assumption of this important office and to reassure you of my delegation's full and constructive support. Also, I would like to welcome the newly arrived colleagues to this august body. My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union yesterday.

It is likely that 2020 and 2021 will make history as the years when life as we knew it paused to a large degree due to a pandemic that has been testing the patience and resolve of our societies in unprecedented ways. While exposing the fragility of life, it also unveiled some of the best aspects of human nature, including our ability to flexibly adapt to new challenges, to cooperate in multilateral contexts and to find innovative and creative solutions to new problems. We should use this positive spirit and dynamism also in this august body. Although the difficulties, impasses and antagonisms inherent to the work of the Conference on Disarmament are not exactly new, a return to pragmatism and positive thinking is always possible, and it is never too late for a new start.

Mr. President, peace and security are one of the main drivers of international cooperation and the very reason for our being here. The challenges and perspectives for the year 2021 that is ahead of us are manifold, and I just want to name a few: the Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, critical to the future success of nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation regime; the future of the New START, the last remaining nuclear arms control instrument; the need to protect the integrity of international law against ongoing efforts to undermine it, for example through the use or threat of use of weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons as means of projecting and exerting power; the risk of a flare-up of regional tensions and conflicts; the nuclear proliferation concerns regarding North Korea and Iran; the modernization of nuclear arsenals by almost all nuclear Powers; the development and weaponization of new and revolutionary technologies in artificial intelligence and quantum computing; outer space as a new potential domain for conflict; and destabilizing developments in cyberspace. A very long list, Mr. President. All of these issues relate in one way or another to our agenda in the Conference on Disarmament, so let us use the scarce time effectively to make things happen and not to block the ample goodwill that exists in this chamber.

Mr. President, as time is precious, I will now dive right into the heart of the matter – that is, how this body plans to organize its work in 2021. The good thing is that we have neither to reinvent the wheel nor to abandon principled national positions to organize our work. Generations of dedicated and committed diplomats have staked out ways of overcoming the impasse that has plagued this institution for too long and narrowing down differences. Nearly no stone has been left unturned in efforts to sketch out procedural alleys which pay due respect to the mandate and the rules of procedure of the Conference. It nowadays takes a pundit to dig into the full history of all those exercises.

We thus heard with great relief that your presidency, in close collaboration with the following five presidencies of this session, has chosen a common-sense approach to bringing this body back to work, avoiding any red lines and building on consensual elements of the past. And by “work”, I mean not endless debates about lofty goals or vague procedural questions but concrete work on the core items on our agenda. The package you are proposing to overcome the deadlock, Mr. President – and we are grateful that you circulated it so early – is far from ideal, but it is clearly a way to engage constructively on the issues that are so pertinent to global peace and security. As our Foreign Minister declared at the 6 January meeting of the countries supporting the Stockholm Initiative, “if we seize the opportunity and make full use of the perspectives 2021 offers, we can put diplomacy back on track towards a

world without nuclear weapons – 2021 can be a watershed year for nuclear disarmament”. With that, I would like to thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of Germany. I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo Miño (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, on behalf of the delegation of Ecuador I would like to express my warmest congratulations to you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You assume the presidency at a delicate and difficult time, especially for this forum, in which the international community faces the challenge of assuming its responsibilities for the common good of humanity. Rest assured that you will receive my delegation’s full support during your presidency, including for your draft programme of work.

At the same time, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Presidents of the 2020 session, who, in a year of great difficulties, did their utmost to advance constructive proposals, which my delegation supported. I particularly wish to highlight the decision taken to carry out consultations at all possible levels – something that is happening again this year.

As we are well aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all countries without distinction; it has had, and will continue to have, devastating health and economic consequences for all our populations, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Its consequences merely confirm what my delegation has said in this forum over the past year about the astonishment provoked by the hunger for domination and power, in pursuit of which hundreds of billions of dollars are invested in accumulating and perfecting weapons, while our health systems suffer from serious shortcomings and millions of people face a daily struggle just to survive.

The pandemic reminds us every day of the vital importance of multilateralism and the ineluctable need for global solidarity and cooperation in the collective interest of the international community as a whole. In this regard, my delegation is very concerned by the failure of the crisis caused by the pandemic to create immediate awareness of the urgent need to strengthen multilateralism.

Moreover, it is apparent that there are difficulties in achieving the ideal of international cooperation, the prospect of harmony and peace is remote and the diplomatic community demonstrably lacks the will to engage in dialogue and negotiations in some forums. In this context, and as I said in my first statement of this session, Ecuador reiterates its traditional position of principle on the right of all countries to participate in multilateral forums without restrictions, particularly in this forum of such great relevance to international peace and security.

Ecuador was one of the countries that submitted a statement of support for the appeal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic, a statement that was reiterated on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations.

Yet in the absence of measures to reduce them, global tensions have been mounting. The global nuclear arms control system and dialogues on non-proliferation and general disarmament are in critical condition. The 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has had to be postponed until the summer, while its expected outcomes have led some to cast doubt on the implementation of previous commitments. No progress has been made in respect of the bilateral and plurilateral treaties between the nuclear-weapon States; indeed, several of them have been suspended and terminated.

We believe that this scenario can be described as confirming an absence of trust, which many leaders are unable or unwilling to build or extend in international relations. This lack of trust is leading the world into a very dangerous impasse characterized by fragility all around.

In this context, Ecuador, faithful to its commitment to peace and convinced of the capacity of multilateralism to achieve the goals of peace and security, reaffirms its

willingness to work until the Conference on Disarmament assumes its responsibility and fulfils its mandate to negotiate legally binding disarmament instruments.

My delegation believes that small countries with little military or economic power have the right to demand security, to jointly pursue the strengthening of multilateralism and to aspire to a peace that is possible only in a world free of weapons of mass destruction. We count on our status as active members of the international community, as constituted in the institutions of the United Nations.

My country, as has been stated in the past, has worked to promote multilateralism as the principal means of guaranteeing peace and security in the world and therefore as the basic mechanism for promoting disarmament and non-proliferation and for seeking an effective international agreement that provides non-nuclear-weapon States with assurances against the use or threat of use of these weapons.

In recent decades, Ecuador has maintained its commitment to peace, disarmament and non-proliferation through active participation in the Conference and in the negotiation of instruments prohibiting weapons of mass destruction and regulating conventional weapons. We therefore welcome tomorrow's entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which represents a humanitarian hope and the beginning of a process that we must strengthen in order to achieve universal ratification.

In 1999, as one of many examples of its leadership in the disarmament sphere, Ecuador chaired the working group of the Disarmament Commission that managed to achieve consensus on principles and guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. There has been little or no consensus on disarmament since then.

Consequently, we recognize the importance of the opinions of member countries of nuclear-weapon-free zones – both those that have been established and those that are being set up – when it comes to identifying the most suitable pathways by which the international community can negotiate effective general and complete disarmament.

Mr. President, we reaffirm our willingness to actively cooperate with your presidency and those of the other Presidents of this session during this important year for disarmament. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Ecuador. I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Constant Rosales (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, it is a great honour for me to take the floor for the first time in the Conference on Disarmament as Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations Office at Geneva. At the outset, please allow me to congratulate you on assuming the presidency and to thank you and other colleagues for your kind words of welcome. My country is also grateful for the efforts that have been made to prepare for this meeting. In addition, I would like to thank Ambassador Ambrazevich of Belarus for his work, which led to the adoption of the 2020 annual report of the Conference and the resolution that was successfully submitted to the General Assembly in December 2020.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement made by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 21. The common goal of the Group of 21 States is based on an aspiration for peace, development and cooperation, in which the Conference plays an indispensable role as the only United Nations body with an explicit negotiating mandate in the sphere of disarmament.

In the Conference on Disarmament, substantive negotiations have been paralysed for more than twenty years, and that paralysis is now accompanied by the collapse of major international security, disarmament and arms control agreements, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Treaty on Open Skies and the New START, all of which, regrettably, have been abandoned by the Government of the United States. The need to overcome the unfortunate stalemate in the Conference and demonstrate the link between complete disarmament and development has become even more palpable in the light of the challenges that we faced in 2020.

Between 2017 and 2019, the risk of nuclear war reached unprecedented highs, higher even than during the cold war, judging by the sums spent on nuclear weapons, particularly the more than \$800 billion spent by the United States alone. Developed countries' massive investment in the design and implementation of weapons technology, to the detriment of, say, global investment in health, has exacerbated the appalling impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – an impact that demonstrated the poor preparation and inadequate response even of the countries that claimed that they were better prepared than others to deal with the pandemic.

My country has repeatedly denounced this cruel and widespread indifference to the suffering of developing countries. In this context of extremely high nuclear risk and international insecurity, Venezuela joins other developing countries in denouncing before this Conference the imposition of unlawful unilateral coercive measures aimed at destroying our economic potential and, of course, undermining the health and well-being of our citizens. These unlawful measures constitute a crime against humanity, violate international law and cause suffering to the peoples of the regions where they are applied. They obviously merit all the complaints that have been filed, including the referral by my Government to the International Criminal Court.

The application of unilateral coercive measures is not unrelated to the disarmament architecture. The purpose of fomenting economic crises in countries with development potential is to create difficult global and regional security conditions that provide a sinister pretext for the strengthening of deterrence and security doctrines, which have already been bolstered by the decision of the United States to abandon the current arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Venezuela, a country with a profoundly anti-hegemonic spirit, and is a firm advocate of diplomacy for peace. It therefore reiterates that the concept of international security cannot be maintained solely by promoting and developing military alliances that are essentially based on deterrence and the threat of the use of nuclear weapons, while at the same time applying unlawful coercive measures aimed at fomenting regional crises.

Mr. President, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, from a critical perspective, does not believe that the collapse of the current disarmament and arms control system would bring about conditions conducive to disarmament or the advent of a new era of arms control. Despite the fragile security situation, exacerbated by the pandemic, we have reflected on the future of the Conference and believe that 2021 offers great opportunities.

First, on 22 January, tomorrow, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will enter into force. This is a giant step forward for humanity, and Venezuela celebrates it. My country calls on the nuclear-weapon States to consider acceding to the Treaty. Its entry into force can add further political momentum to the preparations for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which has already been postponed too often.

Second, since 20 January, new opportunities for constructive dialogue have been emerging, and we hope that the States members of the Conference on Disarmament will seize the opportunity to create the essential conditions for joint efforts by nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States to promote the international arms control process, full disarmament and non-proliferation.

Third, the traumatic impact of the pandemic calls for new ideas and the establishment of a more reasonable and cooperative international order. Today, more than ever, the international community is aware of the resources and efforts that are needed to address serious crises. The Conference can establish itself as a global force in defence of multilateralism.

Fourth, the issues discussed in the Conference are the responsibility not only of its members but also of all States Members of the United Nations. We must firmly commit to multilateralism and an inclusive approach that will make it possible to expand the membership of the Conference.

Finally, the stalemate in the Conference demands that we be practical and creative. The Conference's original purpose was to negotiate legally binding treaties, so we must commence the negotiation of binding instruments such as a treaty banning the production of

fissile material for nuclear weapons. Obviously, it will not be possible to make progress on these issues without an effective programme of work. We believe that the Conference's work can be advanced on the basis of concrete negotiating proposals that have already been made, which is why we support the initiatives put forward by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. As a peace-loving country, we call on States to support this proposal and thus to ensure that the proliferation of weapons in outer space is prevented.

Mr. President, Venezuela favours any initiatives aimed at achieving general and complete disarmament, in particular regional measures that may contribute to the creation of a universal multilateral commitment to disarmament. The region of Latin America and the Caribbean is a zone of peace, free from nuclear weapons, as established in the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco and declared at the Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States in Havana, in 2014. Venezuela thus invites all regions to make a determined effort to reflect this fundamental international value and vigorously condemn any attempt to facilitate or promote any form of arms build-up, especially in the Middle East. We trust that, in 2021, the Conference will be able to make progress towards building the consensus required to ensure international peace and security.

(spoke in French)

Mr. President, I thank you for your patience and am at your disposal for the remainder of the session.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Mr. Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies (Spain) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Allow me, first of all, to congratulate you again on assuming the presidency and to wish you every success. You have the full support of my delegation. Frankly, I must admit that I wish you one particular success above all others: that your presidency will lead us out of the deadlock that has stymied our work for two decades.

I would like to extend my congratulations to the six Presidents of the 2021 session for agreeing to continue their coordination and consultations on decisions and for continuing to convene meetings of the group of six Presidents, together with the last President of the previous session and the first President of the subsequent one. Please also allow me to extend special thanks to the secretariat for its work, which has always been fundamental to our endeavours, and to express my appreciation for its efforts to make documents available and to follow up on our statements.

I endorse the position expressed by the European Union delegation today, just as I endorsed its statement yesterday and will endorse all statements that it makes in the future. Like the delegation of the European Union, I call again on Turkey to reconsider its decision to exclude Cyprus from our work. There are no substantive, geographic or geostrategic reasons for it. We are here to work with generosity and solidarity. In addition, I request the Iranian delegation to withdraw its objection to the participation of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Conference on Disarmament is a forum for dialogue in which all United Nations Member States should have the right to participate if they so wish. These attitudes are regrettable and seriously undermine the constructive spirit that should govern our work.

Let me make a brief assessment of where I think we are: 2020 was a lost year. In some ways, the constraints imposed by the fight against the pandemic obscured or minimized our failure. Yet it is clear that we failed once again to meet our obligation to adopt a programme of work. Today we face the same challenge again. Neither the pandemic nor anything else is an excuse. We cannot repeat our failure of last year.

Spain will spare no effort to achieve our goal. My mandate as Ambassador is to negotiate multilateral disarmament agreements, not to engage in endless debate on working methods and procedures. I am prepared to make great sacrifices if we are able to move forward within the framework of dialogue that may lead to the fulfilment of our mandate.

As I said a year ago, our mandate as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum is precisely that: to negotiate. But it seems that what we insist on negotiating is disagreements, reproaches, complaints and procedures. We keep bringing up topics that are unrelated to this forum and serve only to increase estrangement, controversy, polarization and distrust. Enough is enough. Let us each examine our attitudes and think only of one objective: assuming our mandate and signalling to the world that the time we spend here is useful.

For years, we have been talking about the same plans and projects. Regrettably, however, it seems that we prefer to shut down negotiations before we have even started them. Take a fissile material cut-off treaty. It is a priority for all of us, and we know it would be a great stride towards a safer world. We have the major elements on which a consensus can be built, elements that we all believe to be suitable for a treaty that we consider necessary. My delegation believes that we should start these negotiations as soon as possible.

Despite the echoes from our past, we keep hearing fine words and good intentions from all delegations. But when the time comes to take the step forward, we keep running into the same obstacles, dressed up in words and procedure. We are hostages to a deadlock rooted in closed concepts that we ourselves have created. We have to be pragmatic and open if we really want to succeed. We cannot start every session talking about the same thing only to fail to reach agreement. Unless that is precisely the intention, which would be, and is, embarrassing.

Moreover, the task before us will require an extra effort, as this year is going to be made difficult by the rescheduling of a large number of meetings. The meetings of the parties to the Biological Weapons Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, as well as the all-important Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, have been postponed. Let us set an example of optimism with our work – let us take a step forward. Let us justify our time and presence here by achieving tangible results that meet the expectations others have of us. It is both urgent and necessary that we do so. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Spain. We will now hear from Italy. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Incarnato (Italy): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, let me congratulate you on the assumption of your responsibility as the first President of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Please rest assured of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me add some remarks in my national capacity.

Mr. President, the international scenario which is currently under our eyes remains deeply concerning, with heightened international and regional tensions. After having experienced COVID-19, and while we are still fighting this invisible enemy, we must not and cannot turn a blind eye to our collective responsibility to enhance global security.

In many areas of the world, the pandemic has even exacerbated conflicts, with potentially dramatic consequences, especially for the civilian populations. We therefore immediately supported the appeal launched in March 2020 by Secretary-General Guterres for a ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put all conflicts on lockdown while focusing all together on the fight against the coronavirus.

Given the situation, we need to remind ourselves of the special responsibility that we bear in the Conference. It is of utmost urgency that we act with determination. We need a collective renewed commitment to safeguard and even to strengthen the international disarmament architecture, guaranteeing its proper function without embarking on the path of a new arms race in any domain.

Mr. President, 2020 has been a difficult and complicated year for many reasons. Our work and the disarmament machinery as a whole, too, have suffered from the pandemic. We are grateful to you and to the secretariat for having spared no effort to allow us to be here again in a setting that, though perhaps different, is safe and inclusive.

We should use the experience of 2020 as a lesson to improve our methods of work, to find new paths to cooperation, to put aside our differences in order to better defend our common interest in a more peaceful and secure world. The pandemic has shown even more clearly that effective multilateralism and the rules-based international system are the path, the only path, to success.

For these reasons, Italy reiterates its firm commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism as crucial tools for effective and long-term results in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. We remain engaged in promoting these values, especially within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament, whose role is crucial, as it is the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body.

We fully understand and share the sense of frustration stemming from the long impasse in the Conference's work, which is regrettable. At the same time, we remain convinced that the Conference is an indispensable and unique body in the toolbox of the disarmament community, even though its potential remains clearly unfulfilled.

It is up to us to act in order to preserve and revitalize the Conference. In this sense, we commend the cooperation by the six States holding the presidency in 2021 and are ready to support your efforts for the negotiation of a programme of work. Moreover, we are very much in favour of the possibility of a more pragmatic approach, without protracted procedural debates and with substantive work in many important areas of discussion instead.

Mr. President, Italy reaffirms its firm commitment to disarmament and international security, in particular sharing the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons. Our efforts for effective progress on nuclear disarmament are underpinned by our utmost concern over the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

In this regard, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), with its three mutually reinforcing pillars, remains the cornerstone of the international regime. It provides the only realistic legal framework with which to attain a world without nuclear weapons in a way that promotes international stability and is based on the principle of undiminished security for all. Italy supports the efforts to use the time remaining time to prepare for the NPT Review Conference as an opportunity to build bridges between the States parties to the Treaty and assess the substantial progress achieved so far within the framework of this historic Treaty. We especially acknowledge the increased attention given to risk reduction during the current NPT review cycle and are glad to announce that Italy has decided to give financial support to the programme on nuclear weapons risk reduction of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.

We stand ready to identify ways to support, uphold and preserve the Treaty in the difficult current environment. We call upon States that have not yet done so to join the Treaty as non-nuclear-weapon States, without delay and without conditions, and we call on all States parties to the Treaty to implement all its provisions, as well as commitments agreed at subsequent Review Conferences.

The prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is also one of our key priorities. We call on all States that have not yet done so, particularly the eight remaining annex 2 States, to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay.

We continue to support the immediate commencement of negotiations within the Conference on Disarmament on a treaty dealing with fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. In the meantime, we believe that all relevant States should abide by a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

We also support the resumption of substantive discussions on negative security assurances in the context of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work and with a view to elaborating recommendations dealing with all aspects of such assurances, not excluding an internationally legally binding instrument.

Mr. President, nuclear-weapon States bear fundamental responsibilities, and we encourage them to seek further reductions in their nuclear arsenals, while enhancing transparency on their policies and doctrines. We are convinced that the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world and effective, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament can be

attained only through an inclusive and progressive approach, in accordance with article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, based on concrete and effective measures.

We welcome the strategic stability dialogue between the United States and the Russian Federation and encourage those two countries to seek further reductions to their arsenals, to use the remaining weeks to extend the New START and to engage on other arms control arrangements, including with a view to broadening the scope of such arrangements.

Italy also values all initiatives undertaken in the field of nuclear disarmament verification as important tools to build trust and confidence among nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States. In this regard, we support the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and welcome the work of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament.

In the context of the international efforts aimed at strengthening the non-proliferation architecture, Italy believes that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action remains a key element. We remain convinced that the full implementation of the deal and of all provisions of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015) is still in the interest of all, as a key pillar of the global non-proliferation architecture and a crucial contribution to regional stability.

Italy is gravely concerned by further Iranian disengagement from the Plan of Action and urges Iran to return to full compliance without delay and to cooperate fully and in timely fashion with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) with respect to all its safeguards-related commitments in order to clarify and resolve any pending issues. We are ready to support initiatives aimed at de-escalating the present tensions and restoring the integrity of the Plan of Action.

The repeated ballistic missile launches by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in violation of multiple Security Council resolutions, also deeply concern us. The country's intention to retain and further develop its nuclear and ballistic programmes is a threat that we cannot ignore. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to take concrete steps towards complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization, in which IAEA needs to play a key role. We therefore call on Pyongyang to engage in credible negotiations in this respect and to give tangible proof of its asserted willingness to denuclearize by returning to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and resuming its collaboration with IAEA. In the meantime, the international sanctions regime needs to remain in place and be effectively implemented, and the aim of the negotiating process must be to work towards this goal.

Mr. President, allow me to refer, in conclusion, to two important items on our agenda, which I will briefly touch upon jointly: the prevention of an arms race in outer space and new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons.

Italy strongly believes that technological development and scientific progress are critical to the well-being of humanity and have to be seen as instruments to promote peace and sustainable growth. Working on disarmament, we have the great responsibility of providing the proper framework for these developments, preventing any dangerous or negative use. From this perspective, we are firmly committed to the long-term sustainability, safety and security of outer space and believe that a comprehensive and effective international regulatory environment should be created and put in place.

We believe it is important to develop initiatives that will increase confidence and mutual trust between current and future actors. In this regard, we would like to highlight the importance of transparency and confidence-building measures, which can contribute to the security, safety and sustainability of activities in outer space and in cyberspace. We encourage further international cooperation to elaborate agreed principles of responsible behaviour.

Mr. President, also in light of the increasing tendency to bring disarmament negotiations outside the Conference on Disarmament, today, more than ever, we are facing the concrete risk of the marginalization of the Conference and, ultimately, of its irrelevance. At the same time, the deteriorating security environment calls for renewed determination to advance our shared disarmament goals and adds a new sense of urgency to our efforts.

To conclude, Italy believes that greater interaction of the Conference with civil society – broadly, encompassing academia, non-governmental organizations and the private sector – could make a key contribution to our work, helping to deepen our technical discussions and substantively enriching our debate. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Italy and now give the floor to the representative of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union, to which I would like to add a few points in my national capacity.

Allow me first to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to wish you every success. You can count on the full support of France throughout your presidency. We appreciate the fact that you prepared for your presidency in close, continuous consultation with this session's other Presidents, thus giving your joint decisions particular authority and ensuring greater continuity and efficiency in the governance of the Conference. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues and wish them all the best in their work.

As we start the year, it is good to recall past successes of the Conference on Disarmament – the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty – so that we may envision a constructive future once again. Although the session is opening in a very difficult geopolitical context, which the coronavirus crisis is not helping to ease, it is with a sincere sense of responsibility and willingness to cooperate that we must face the coming months.

In this respect, I must say that we deplore the decision of Turkey to refuse observer status to Cyprus. We also deplore the decision of Iran to deny observer status to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. These positions are serious departures from the principle of multilateralism and an abuse of the consensus rule that we consider absolutely unacceptable. In view of the challenges to international peace and security, it is in everyone's interest for every State to be able to participate in the work of the Conference. Accordingly, we, like others, call on Turkey and Iran to reconsider their positions.

France supports efforts to establish subsidiary bodies on the various topics on the Conference's agenda, as the establishment of such bodies would provide an opportunity for in-depth preparatory work with a view to, context permitting, the negotiation of multilateral disarmament treaties. For that reason, my country is actively promoting the immediate launch of negotiations in the Conference on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices on the basis of the mandate set out in document CD/1299. This is unquestionably the ripest subject for negotiations and would contribute to advancing nuclear disarmament by limiting the production of nuclear weapons.

The issue of outer space is also very topical and requires serious strategic dialogue. In a rapidly changing space environment, new threats erode the security of our activities and operations and warrant analysis. Given the importance of outer space to the security of all nations, it is urgent that we engage in such analysis and formulate pragmatic proposals to improve the safety and security of our operations. Starting down this road is in the interest of us all. For my country, that includes the regulation of behaviour in outer space, for which the international community expressed very broad support during the most recent general debate of the General Assembly.

Furthermore, the establishment of subsidiary bodies would enable us to approach the Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as well prepared as possible. At a time when the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery continues to grow, the Review Conference must be an opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering support for the preservation and strengthening of the three pillars of this key instrument of the non-proliferation regime.

Finally, the establishment of subsidiary bodies would add value to the Conference on Disarmament. Let us be clear: the starting point for a return to the core of the Conference's mandate – namely, negotiation – is to properly lay the groundwork and analyse the conditions

likely to bring to light possible elements of consensus based on our individual and collective security interests.

The functioning of the Conference must be discussed, and recent experience has shown that we all agree on this point. In this respect, Australia put forward a very important proposal last year to make the rules of procedure gender-neutral. We believe that the Conference should examine how that proposal could be implemented.

For the reasons mentioned earlier, France is prepared to join the consensus on the package of documents comprising a draft programme of work, as proposed by this session's six Presidents under your direction, Mr. President. We are aware, however, of the difficulties in reaching early agreement on this draft. We therefore stand ready to participate in any thematic discussions that the successive presidencies may wish to organize at their discretion. The Conference is the only tool available to the international community not only for negotiating disarmament treaties but also for maintaining a regular strategic dialogue, which is an indispensable prerequisite to those negotiations. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the representative of Kenya.

Mr. Mailu (Kenya): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. Allow me to extend to you our sincere congratulations on your assumption as the first President of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Kenya commends your able leadership and assures you of its full support and cooperation during your presidency.

Like other speakers who have taken the floor, please allow me to welcome our new colleagues to Geneva in general and to the work of the Conference on Disarmament in particular. Additionally, Kenya takes this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, for her comprehensive remarks on Tuesday, which, I am convinced, have set an important tone for the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, our deliberations today are taking place against the backdrop of the second wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic. With new strains of the virus emerging in various parts of the world and vaccination programmes being rolled out globally, it is a fact that the global community of nations is still reeling from the devastating effects of this virus, the worst in a hundred years. It has tested humanity beyond comprehension, and the need to carry on with life, amid the new normal, is something that we all now have to live with.

While the global focus and attention have been devoted to measures and efforts to curb the spread of the pandemic, we have unfortunately continued to witness disturbing events across the world that pose a threat to international peace and security. Increased geopolitical posturing, heightened tensions, the crumbling arms control architecture and the modernization of defence systems, as well as increased spending on sophisticated weapons, continue to do more harm than good to an already fragile international security environment. All this while our nations are being ravaged by an invisible and lethal virus.

There is therefore no doubt that 2021 is a critical year for the disarmament community and the hopes that the new vaccines bring with them to a gravely hurting world. The year is particularly significant for disarmament, given the calendar of events and the important work that lies ahead.

In this regard, Mr. President, Kenya reaffirms that the Conference on Disarmament is the single multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament. Since its recognition in 1979, at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the Conference's unique mandate on multilateral arms control and disarmament issues has made it an integral forum for the maintenance of global peace and security. Despite the challenges that this Conference has faced in the past two decades, we remain hopeful that in 2021, our deliberations will be aimed at achieving substantial progress in adopting a programme of

work. Despite the restrictions in place on in-person meetings, our virtual deliberations are evidence that we have the flexibility, ability to compromise and commitment required to carry the work of this Conference forward.

We owe it to future generations to put in place disarmament frameworks that will enhance international peace and security for humanity, as the global trends we are currently witnessing leave much to be desired. The increasing production of weapons and their great destructive firepower, including nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, are a major threat to a peaceful and secure world. In such a global context, the relevance of the Conference on Disarmament is unquestionable.

Mr. President, Kenya, as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, reaffirms its long-standing and unwavering commitment to nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and a world free of nuclear weapons. Kenya, a State party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty since 1970, supports the peaceful research and development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty in line with the framework and protocols of the International Atomic Energy Agency. As provided in article VI of the Treaty, all countries should promote and cooperate in the peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy, while at the same time working towards complete nuclear disarmament. In this regard, we look forward to the tenth Review Conference, which is scheduled to take place in August 2021. Kenya truly hopes that this Review Conference will pave the way to a world without the threat of nuclear weapons. Kenya further hopes that it will reaffirm the indispensable role of the Treaty in promoting non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

As a State party to the Treaty of Pelindaba (the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Kenya reiterates its long-standing commitment to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty remains a priority for Kenya. As that Treaty celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary this year, we join other States signatories in urging the annex 2 States that are yet to ratify the Treaty to take the necessary steps to bring the Treaty into force. The entry into force of the Treaty would constitute a credible step towards global nuclear disarmament and a world without nuclear weapons.

Additionally, the entry into force, this week, of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which Kenya voted for, marks a historic moment in achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

My delegation notes with concern that illicit transfers of and trade in small arms and light weapons continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and security. The effects of the widespread availability of small arms and their misuse have long contributed to many unnecessary conflicts around the world. As Chair-designate of the Seventh Biennial Meeting of States on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Kenya is committed to the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the International Tracing Instrument.

Our commitment to disarmament and the maintenance of international peace and security is further demonstrated by our role as Chair of the postponed 2020 Meeting of the States Parties of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. While we are yet to arrive at an agreement on how best to conduct our meetings under the Convention, it is evident that the catastrophic events of 2020 have leveraged the Convention as an integral instrument not only for international peace and security but also for global health and the well-being of mankind.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating the importance of the Conference on Disarmament in the maintenance of international peace and security. In this regard, Kenya extends its appreciation to you, Mr. President, and the five incoming Presidents of the Conference on Disarmament for the 2021 session for their diligence, hard work and proactive engagement in circulating the draft package proposal in advance of the start of our session, further demonstrating the commitment of the group of the session's six Presidents. This effort should be matched by a spirit of constructive engagement, flexibility and much-needed political will from the membership of this Conference.

I urge us all to redouble our efforts so that we can, through consensus, take the work of the Conference on Disarmament forward.

Kenya hopes that 2021 will be momentous for the Conference, a year when we can begin writing a new narrative for the Conference on Disarmament, of overcoming the impasse and achieving substantial progress. I thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Kenya. I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Müller (Austria): Mr. President, allow me first to congratulate you upon your assumption of the first Conference on Disarmament presidency of 2021. We are pleased to see that the new approach taken last year by the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session proved helpful and has now been continued. Austria fully supports the efforts of Belgium together with the five other States that will hold the presidency in 2021 – Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada and Chile – and wishes you every success.

Austria fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. But I would like to add a few comments in my national capacity.

In these times of global pandemic, even more than in regular times, it is our shared responsibility to demonstrate that multilateralism matters. In our interconnected world, many of today's challenges have a global impact. And global challenges need global solutions. Despite the urgent need to ease tension and build trust and confidence, we are witnessing a worrying erosion of the arms control architecture, coupled with increased investment in armaments, modernization efforts, including in the nuclear field, the development of new and previously unthinkable weapons, as well as new means, methods and areas of warfare. As an urgent matter of credibility, it is high time for the Conference on Disarmament to demonstrate that it is ready to work and fulfil the negotiating mandate on the issues entrusted to it by the international community.

In times of increased geopolitical tension, the need to advance on the issues on the Conference agenda becomes even more urgent. Nuclear weapons continue to hang like the sword of Damocles over the existence of humanity. Given the associated risks of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences, we have no time to waste; simply waiting is not an option or a strategy. For this truly global issue, we are all called upon to act within our respective possibilities. Austria is encouraged by the fact of this week's entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We hope that this new reality will contribute to create further momentum towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons, a global objective already evoked by the first General Assembly resolution more than seventy-five years ago.

Mr. President, we thank you for the draft package proposal that was circulated well ahead of the meeting and serves as a welcome sign of transparency, consistency and predictability. We appreciate that you are building upon the 2020 work of this body and we look forward to the 2021 session of the Conference. We will fully support the group of the six States that will hold the presidency this year in their endeavours to agree to a programme of work and explicitly welcome the draft that is on the table. Austria encourages others, too, to demonstrate political will in support of the Conference and its important issues of international security.

It is also time to look at the challenges and opportunities that we face with a view to reinvigorating substantive work towards concrete negotiations, which regrettably have not been possible in this forum for twenty-five years. Let me once again thank Australia for its efforts and the useful paper it submitted last year. We wish to highlight Austria's continued determination to explore how the Conference can become more operational and effectively contribute to enhancing international security.

Progress in disarmament is in all our interests. History has shown us the powerful impact disarmament measures and agreements have had on improving the security environment and easing tension. Disarmament will continue to be a top priority for Austria.

Gender equality, as well as looking at the impact of weapons through a gender lens, also remains a global priority in our actions. The inclusion of youth, civil society, academia, industry and research institutions could also be beneficial for our discussions.

While Austria will elaborate in more detail on issues pertaining to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, allow me as a matter of urgency to echo others and call for the swift extension of the New START before its expiration. We would welcome negotiations on a broader follow-up agreement.

The year 2021 will be an important year in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. My delegation is hopeful that this year can also be an important year for the Conference after a long winter – if the Conference cooperatively can agree to take real steps towards finally fulfilling its negotiating mandate.

We vehemently oppose the unfortunate Turkish decision to object once again to the request by Cyprus to resume participating as an observer after what had been more than twenty years of uninterrupted participation. Likewise, we oppose the decision of Iran to object to the participation of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Such objections stand contrary to the basic principles of multilateralism and are highly regrettable. We fully support the right of these United Nations Member States to participate as observers in the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, before concluding, allow me to seize this opportunity and warmly invite all delegates to participate in a high-level online event, jointly organized by the core group members, tomorrow, 22 January 2021, at 2 p.m. to mark the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. I thank you very much for your attention.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Austria.

(spoke in French)

I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Zniber (Morocco) *(spoke in French)*: Madam Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Representative of the Secretary-General, Excellencies, the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco wishes first of all to congratulate the Kingdom of Belgium on its assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for the first part of the 2021 session and to assure it of our full readiness to contribute actively to the success of the Conference's work under the ongoing extraordinary circumstances arising from the pandemic. My delegation welcomes the fervour with which you have begun your presidency, including the preparation of a draft programme of work well in advance of your term. It was with great interest and enthusiasm that my delegation examined this draft programme of work, and we are confident that the discussions in the Conference will unfold satisfactorily in the coming plenary meetings, so as to avoid as best we can the scenario of the past twenty years.

My delegation would also like to see the issue of requests to observe the work of the Conference resolved promptly, without further controversy or hindrance, and asks that all the objections to those requests be unconditionally withdrawn. The contributions of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are important for the Conference and would be useful and encouraging for our work.

With regard to disputes over security and disarmament issues in the international community, the scope of which is growing ever larger, Morocco believes that there is a risk that the world will tip into chronic instability as a result of increasingly blatant imbalances caused by fear and distrust. That being said, we remain confident because, despite the difficult global health and security context, significant changes appear to be taking place in this new year that augur well, we hope, for the adoption of our programme of work.

We must reconsider our strategic priorities through better consultation so that we can give a major boost to the central issues of nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, cybersecurity and other pressing issues, such as the development of autonomous weapons. The adoption and implementation of a programme of work are the linchpin of that goal, and without a programme of work no real progress can be made given the confrontations and deep disagreements prompted by the diametrically opposed views of

a large number of delegations. It is not mere lip service to stress the vital importance of our forum to the multilateral disarmament system and its highly strategic place on the international scene. In this respect, my delegation calls for the Conference on Disarmament to return to its original mandate, thus enabling it to negotiate and adopt multilateral disarmament instruments.

While it does not intend to repeat the many detailed addresses it delivered on this subject at the previous session, my delegation would like to point out, from a methodological standpoint, that consultations must be inclusive and transparent so that they may benefit from contributions and ideas likely to bring us closer to the consensus we seek.

The issue of disarmament is one of the priorities of my country's multilateral diplomacy and, in that regard, I would like to note the various roles my country and its delegations played in the drafting and implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, as well as in its many other active presidencies. Despite the difficulties we are encountering here in the Conference on Disarmament, Morocco has undertaken various initiatives in this area, which is crucial for peace and security in the world. Examples include: organizing, in Marrakech, the sixteenth regional meeting of national authorities of African States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention; since 2016, co-chairing, together with the Netherlands and then Canada, the Global Counterterrorism Forum; organizing, in partnership with the United States Department of State, an international workshop on nuclear detection at land and sea borders, within the framework of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, in Tangier, in the north of my country; and ratifying the Treaty of Pelindaba on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa. My delegation has also stressed the importance of disarmament in several other contexts here in Geneva, in particular at the level of the International Organization of la Francophonie, as co-Chair, together with France, of the working group on disarmament, which is considering, among other things, ways to step up the efforts made in the Conference to adopt a programme of work and engage in serious and fruitful discussions.

Finally, I think it is also important to consider proposals and suggestions emanating from the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, launched in 2018, which we believe contains proposals that can give our work the necessary impetus.

In conclusion, Mr. President, there is no need to remind participants that disarmament is one of the founding pillars of the United Nations and that achieving disarmament for the benefit of all remains an essential goal for the entire international community. My delegation will take the floor again later to share its ideas about the various aspects of our programme of work, as well as ways of bringing views closer together, and stresses that you can count on it in your ongoing (and timely) efforts. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Morocco and now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Soualem (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I would like to begin by expressing my sincere congratulations on the assumption by Belgium of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation fully supports your efforts and those of the five other Presidents of the session, from Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada and Chile. We appreciate your collective efforts and the spirit of cooperation and coordination that sends a strong positive message as we start our work.

We are confident that your country's participation in the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session over the past year will be a positive factor as we start the current session. We believe that the positive and constructive collective will that has marked the work of the Conference continues to be an asset upon which we can rely. We can also count on the participation of your predecessors, the Presidents of the 2020 session, who spared no effort in trying to advance the work of the Conference during a session that was severely affected by the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. President, my delegation appreciates the decision to build on what was achieved during the last session of the Conference and take advantage of the new dynamic that emerged thanks to the approach of collective, participatory and constructive action aimed at creating

a positive atmosphere and the use of the language of dialogue and the promotion of mutual trust as a basis for advancing the work of our Conference.

The early presentation of a package of draft decisions at the current session, based on last year's proposals, highlights the validity of this choice, which will advance the work of the Conference and alleviate the impact of the exceptional circumstances associated with the global health crisis on our work, which we hope will be temporary, given the procedural rules of the Conference.

This approach also reflects the relevance of the framework centred on the five guiding principles under which those proposals were developed. The principles are a collective approach, a tempered approach, compliance with uniform, common criteria, remaining flexible and taking advantage of the opportunities available under the Conference's rules of procedure and the use of the opportunities offered by the rules of procedure and accepted working practices, as well as successful experiences related to decisions adopted by consensus, on the basis of various recent proposals and initiatives and with the aim of restoring the Conference's status as a negotiating forum.

The worsening global health crisis gives us reason to draw lessons on the common destiny of humanity in the face of the challenges before it in various fields and to reflect on the imperative to implement the Conference's negotiating mandate and move away from the expression of positions to joint awareness and action to counter the risks associated with disarmament issues, guided by the Charter of the United Nations, to save future generations from the scourge of war and to establish international peace and security.

In this context, we should work together in accordance with the goals and objectives of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the first paragraph of which recognizes that the ending of the arms race and the achievement of real disarmament are tasks of primary importance and urgency, and that to meet this historic challenge is in the political and economic interests of all nations and peoples of the world as well as in the interests of ensuring their genuine security and peaceful future.

It is well known that the work of the Conference on Disarmament has marked the world through its successes in negotiating and adopting international instruments, which required much effort, patience and time, in the midst of an evolving reality with a range of obstacles that can hinder the emergence of a common vision in respect of certain issues.

In the current context, it is of fundamental importance that the Conference respond to the many urgent calls it receives and send the positive response that the international community, and more generally global public opinion, expects from it in order to preserve its credibility, which has been threatened, and enhance its ability to fulfil its responsibilities, prioritizing the common good while taking national interests into account.

It is necessary at this stage to muster the political will and join forces to activate the Conference and other disarmament mechanisms to reaffirm the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and to adopt objective, effective and legally binding multilateral instruments to promote international peace and security.

Algeria has always played a role in the pivotal moments of the history of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament. In 1979, it was the first State to launch the deliberations of the Committee on Disarmament, which became the Conference on Disarmament. It had the honour of chairing the Conference in 2009, which led to the decision for the establishment of a programme of work contained in document CD/1864, under the presidency of Ambassador Idriss Jazairy, who passed away last year and whose legacy lives on in the work of the Conference.

Algeria also chaired the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), at which the 13 practical steps for nuclear disarmament were agreed. In 2015, under the Algerian presidency of the First Committee, the foundations were laid for the 2017 United Nations conference at which the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted, which we are pleased to see enter into force this week. Algeria also co-chaired the ninth Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Algeria, which suffered and continues to suffer serious human and environmental consequences as a result of the nuclear tests carried out on its territory during colonial times, is driven by a firm conviction that nuclear disarmament remains a key priority for Algeria, as it does for the vast majority of the members of the Conference and the international community as a whole, and that it is the only guarantee to spare humanity the imminent dangers of nuclear weapons. In this context, we hope that the tenth NPT Review Conference, which is due to take place in a few months' time, will lead to concrete results that reflect the aspirations of the international community.

We also stress the importance of strengthening efforts to achieve universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in order to speed up its entry into force.

Furthermore, the conclusion of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices is of particular significance if we are to adequately address the issue of fissile material stocks. Likewise, it will strengthen the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

My country believes that achieving tangible progress in terms of negative security assurances through the conclusion of a legally binding international instrument is imperative in order to protect non-nuclear-weapon States from the use or threat of use of such weapons.

As for outer space, which poses a special challenge to international security, it is in all of our interests to ensure the necessary conditions for the peaceful and safe use of outer space. Emphasizing the importance of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, we believe it is important to set standards that prevent the placement of weapons in outer space.

Mr. President, I can only reiterate the full readiness of Algeria to contribute to efforts to make the Conference a success as we begin a new session and wish you and your successors success in the performance of your duties. Thank you for your kind attention.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Algeria. I am told that the interpreters are willing to continue for a few more minutes. I thank them for their flexibility and will now give the floor to our last speaker of the morning, the representative of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Aitzhanova (Kazakhstan): Thank you. Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Let me assure you of our readiness to assist you in carrying out your important duties.

Following the important work done by the Presidents of the Conference in 2020, in particular the package circulated under the Algerian presidency and the consultations that were held, we would like to express our support for your proposal for a draft programme of work for 2021. We believe that after careful consideration, the member States would be able to adopt this document and start substantive work.

The work of the Conference in the new year should commence on a positive note. In this regard, we believe that all States Members of the United Nations, including those that requested observer status at the Conference, should have the right to participate in and follow the proceedings of the Conference and that this right should be respected.

Mr. President, 2020 was a special year for multilateral diplomacy. It was the year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, the overall mood was not celebratory.

The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly came into our lives and exposed unprecedented challenges in many areas, from national health systems to education, from business activities to international relations. Yet the COVID crisis might become an opportunity to reunite and continue the pursuit of common goals in multilateral diplomacy.

In this context, disarmament must be urgent and the highest priority. Kazakhstan firmly supports the key role of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as the cornerstone of international security and calls for strict compliance by both nuclear and non-nuclear States with their commitments. The upcoming NPT Review Conference should not only reaffirm the decisions of the previous conferences but also yield specific tasks for the next cycle. In

this regard, the creation of zones free of nuclear weapons and strengthened cooperation between existing ones can serve as a tangible outcome of the Review Conference.

We welcome the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and believe that this multilateral instrument will contribute to the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons. On 29 August 2021, the thirtieth anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site, Kazakhstan will celebrate the International Day against Nuclear Tests. We set an example that was followed by others and eventually led to the adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

The pandemic highlighted once again the long-debated issue of creating a multilateral body to coordinate the implementation of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. Of the three existing global regimes for nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, respectively, only the Biological Weapons Convention lacks a mechanism to monitor its implementation.

Now, with issues of biological safety in the spotlight, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, proposed considering the establishment of a special multilateral body based on the Convention, which would be called the International Agency for Biological Safety and accountable to the Security Council.

This proposal builds upon the groundwork already undertaken by parties to the Convention, especially in the area of confidence-building, transparency and exchange of information. We plan to produce a working paper which will allow all interested States to engage in an in-depth discussion of this initiative.

Mr. President, it is critically important to maintain and strengthen the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral forum for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. We urge all members to demonstrate political will and overcome differences and start substantive work. The core principle of the Conference is consensus. It is only through consensus that we can ensure the universality of our decisions.

Nuclear disarmament is the most important goal. Enormous nuclear arsenals make the world less safe and less predictable. The conclusion of a fissile material cut-off treaty will help to minimize the chances of the development of new military nuclear programmes, significantly improve the control of existing material and reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism.

It is imperative to intensify further deliberations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space by involving other relevant international forums. We can use a draft treaty on the prevention of placement of weapons in outer space as a basis for future negotiations.

As a party to the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan supports the development of an international, legally binding document on negative security assurances. At the same time, new challenges and threats to international security should not be ignored by the States members of the Conference on Disarmament.

In order to revitalize the work of the Conference, we are ready to consider a review of working methods without prejudice to principles of consensus. We also welcome the expansion of the Conference membership. A broader participation of States in the disarmament process will provide a new impetus to the work of the Conference.

Dear President, in conclusion, let me inform you that the unveiling of the bust of Abai Qunanbaiuly, a great Kazakh scholar and poet born in the region of Semipalatinsk, former nuclear test site, took place at the Palais des Nations in December. The unveiling took place in commemoration of Abai's birth 175 years earlier and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, and his bust was placed in front of the entrance to the Council Chamber.

At the opening ceremony Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, noted Abai's rich legacy and its importance as a bridge connecting Western and Eastern cultures. From now on, diplomats entering or leaving the meetings of the Conference on Disarmament will be facing the bust of Abai and be reminded of his words: "Love all humanity like your own kin." I hope his line will serve as guiding words to the United Nations in our efforts to contribute to the strengthening of peace, unity and revival of multilateralism. Thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Kazakhstan. This concludes our meeting this morning. We will reconvene at 3 p.m. today, using the same link, and we will start the list of speakers with Japan. Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.