
Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and fifty-fourth plenary meeting

Held via videoconference on Thursday, 4 February 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve..... (Belgium)



The President: I call to order the 1554th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. I would first like to open the floor to delegates who wish to speak on matters not related to the draft package proposal. The first speaker I have on my list is Ambassador Wood of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Mr. President, I would like to begin my remarks today with something that has been a topic of much discussion in this body over the course of the past year. As I am sure you have all seen, yesterday the United States and the Russian Federation completed the necessary legal procedures to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) for five years. The extension agreement is now in force. The United States believes that the New START is manifestly in the national security interests of the United States, our allies and the global community. Its verification regime enables the United States and Russia to monitor each other's compliance with the Treaty, giving us confidence that our respective forces remain within the treaty limits and providing us with insight into each other's strategic nuclear forces and operations that would be lost without extension of the Treaty. The United States is in compliance with our New START obligations and we have consistently assessed that Russia has also been in compliance with its New START obligations since the Treaty entered into force in 2011. We look forward to a continuation of that track record.

Indeed, the New START verification mechanism is the type of system that I, and others, have promoted in this body as absolutely necessary to any effective disarmament effort. As the United States Commissioner of the Treaty's implementation body, the Bilateral Consultative Commission, I know first-hand how important verification is to the legitimacy and effectiveness of this treaty. It takes constant engagement, oversight and transparent communication, regardless of what else may be happening in the relationship or the world at large. I encourage this body to take to heart the lessons we have learned through the implementation of the Treaty as we consider verification and compliance issues.

President Biden views the Treaty's continuation as the beginning, not the end, of our engagement on strategic issues, including in this body. For, while this five-year extension offers a brief reprieve, this is no time for complacency. Even with the continuation of the New START, there is still an urgent need to pursue new forms of arms control that cover more weapons and eventually more countries. The United States will therefore engage with Russia on strategic stability discussions that explore a range of arms control regimes, including limits on all Russian and American nuclear weapons, and other emerging strategic stability issues. The United States will also seek to engage China on nuclear arms control and risk reduction. I hope that China will join us in that effort, and I ask the other delegations here to continue to encourage China to do so.

Mr. President, let me turn now to the immediate work of this conference. As I stated last week, the United States supports the programme of work and the associated package. I appreciate the clarifications you put forward in the revised version, which we are considering today, and hope that we can adopt the package quickly. We have no time to lose in getting to substantive work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States for his statement and I now give the floor to Ambassador Gennady Gatilov of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, I thank you for this opportunity to address the Conference. My reason for doing so is highly significant and is directly related to issues of arms control and disarmament, which we have a mandate to deal with together here in Geneva. I am referring specifically to the agreement recently reached between Russia and the United States to extend the 2010 New START by five years and the completion, on 3 February, of all the national procedures required for its implementation.

Without this agreement, the last remaining Russian-American nuclear arms limitation treaty would in fact have been consigned to the history books tomorrow, 5 February. It does not take a great expert to realize the devastating consequences that such a development might have had.

It is particularly encouraging that, when it came to the question of extending the New START, a balanced approach prevailed, one that was based on an understanding by the leadership of two nuclear-weapon States that they have a special responsibility for maintaining strategic stability, preserving peace and strengthening international security.

The question of extending the New START had been on the list of Russian priorities in the area of nuclear weapons control since 5 February 2018, when the parties to the Treaty had reached the quantitative limits established thereunder. Even then, the Russian Federation had been guided by the imperative of extending the operation of this bilateral treaty. After all, it provides for bespoke mechanisms for addressing mutual concerns and verifying compliance with obligations. Most importantly, it establishes reasonable parity in strategic offensive weapons without compromising the military security of either country.

This position was strengthened by targeted initiatives at the highest political level. I note in particular that, for three years, we remained pragmatic but also optimistic. Alongside discussions about the extension with our American partners, painstaking preparatory work was under way in Moscow to sort out the national procedural formalities so that the ratification of the extension of the treaty could be completed as quickly as possible in the event that the decision to extend was ultimately taken. It is worth noting that this work was not in vain. As a result of these measures, we managed to progress from consideration of the question of the extension by both chambers of the Federal Assembly to signature by the President within the shortest possible period – a matter of days.

We welcome the decision by the new administration of the United States to engage in the Russian initiative to extend the Treaty for five years without any conditions. For us, the series of steps taken by President Biden, who has delivered on his campaign promises with real action, bodes well. I would like to emphasize that the extension of the New START has several different implications.

Above all, in taking this step, Russia and the United States have put the brakes on any further erosion of the system of arms control and disarmament treaties, which is a cause of growing international concern.

Moreover, the extension of the New START for a further five years will provide the level of trust, predictability and transparency needed to forge a constructive, engaged and equal bilateral dialogue on a wide range of arms control issues, primarily those relating to the maintenance of strategic stability. We hope that the new administration of the United States will welcome other Russian initiatives in this regard.

Lastly, a five-year period gives us the time to work thoughtfully and meticulously with our American colleagues to shape a new “security order”, taking into account and balancing the defence interests of both countries. The results of these efforts may well serve as a basis for a new treaty or set of treaties to strengthen international security.

To summarize, I wish to note that the extension of the New START is an extremely important step towards a new system of nuclear arms control, albeit as yet only the first.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Russian Federation for his statement. Distinguished colleagues, I think these were two important statements and that some of you might like to react to them. In the interest of time, I would like to propose that delegates do that in combination with their remarks on the package proposal or any other matters, so that each delegate takes the floor only once.

I will now introduce the revised package proposal contained in document CD/WP.632, which was circulated by the secretariat to Conference on Disarmament members and non-member States on Friday, 29 January 2021. In this revised version, the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference have sought to strike a delicate balance between the various comments received. On some elements, like operative paragraphs 1 or 3, you will see that we go back to the language of the package proposed by the six Presidents of the 2020 session, circulated under the Algerian presidency last year. The rest of the amendments are inspired by various proposals made by delegations.

I would like to thank the delegations that expressed their views on the package during last week’s plenary, in bilateral consultations and in writing. Before opening the floor to hear

the comments on this revised version, I would like to ask you to keep in mind what we are trying to achieve here. We are not yet writing a treaty; we are trying to enable the Conference on Disarmament to start its work; we are trying to open the door of the meeting room, so to speak. We are here to carry out our work as diplomats, talk to each other, have a dialogue, discuss technical issues and substantial issues and to try to make progress; and I think it is time we did just that. I will now open the floor for discussion.

The first speaker on my list is the Ambassador of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Aitzhanova (Kazakhstan): Mr. President, I wish to reiterate that the work of the Conference in the New Year should commence on a positive note. In this regard, we believe that all United Nations Member States, including those who have requested observer status, should have the right to participate and follow the proceedings of the Conference on Disarmament and this right should be respected.

We know that complex political issues lie behind the current discussion about the requests of some States to be given observer status at the Conference on Disarmament. Still we believe that, given the Conference's mandate to consider the important issues related to multilateral disarmament, we need to concentrate on and work tirelessly within our mandate, and at the same time demonstrate openness to those who wish to follow the proceedings of the forum. I would like to thank you, President, for your initiative to hold bilateral contacts with delegations concerned, and I hope that those delegations will take into account the views of the overwhelming majority.

Secondly, I want to reiterate our position on the commencement of the substantive work of the Conference. Since the beginning of the year, two important events have already taken place in the area of disarmament: the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the decision of the Russian Federation and the United States to extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty for five years. Kazakhstan welcomes the former as a step towards nuclear disarmament and the latter as an important measure in ensuring predictability and maintaining the bilateral mechanism of strategic stability. Another major event, the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, is expected to take place in August 2021.

In this situation, the Conference cannot afford inaction. We know that the proposed package on the programme of work presented and updated by the Presidents of the current session of the Conference is based on important work done by the Presidents of the 2020 session, specifically the package circulated under the Algerian presidency. It is not an ideal solution for many delegations but can still form a basis for compromise. We believe that, after careful consideration, the member States will be able to adopt this document and start the substantive work of the forum.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Kazakhstan. The next speaker is the Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Sánchez De Lerín (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, first of all, to welcome the extension of the New START between Russia and the United States and, at the same time, call on nuclear-weapon States to take effective steps to reduce their arsenals in compliance with article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We also request transparency in the implementation of both the New START and disarmament measures in general, in order to strengthen verification capabilities. Without effective verification, no progress can be measured. This announcement is only a step in the right direction, which must be accompanied by further agreements and measures aimed at our sole objective, which is complete nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, I am delighted to receive your proposal for a programme of work and thank all six presidencies of the current session of the Conference for the dialogue and consultations that they have carried out to allow us to reach this point. It is undoubtedly inspired, so to speak, by the one that we failed to adopt a year ago, I believe by a very small margin. Even then, it seemed to me to be an excellent proposal for resuming substantive dialogue within a flexible framework, allowing us to create the atmosphere of trust and cooperation that is so essential to the fulfilment of our mandate.

Naturally, the proposal is not perfect and cannot satisfy everyone's demands and priorities, but it does provide an appropriate space for consultations so that, working together, with some input and a little give and take on all sides, we can find a common denominator. Because that is what deciding by consensus is all about: listening to others, enabling understanding and making an effort to reach agreement. It is not about imposing vetoes or red lines with which compliance is impossible. What I expect from all my colleagues and from all the delegations is a clear effort to reach agreement, not contemptuous blocking tactics.

Mr. President, Spain has only one request: that the package we approve should be a programme of work, not a substitute, a plan B or a timetable in disguise. It has to be a programme of work, with the weaknesses and compromises that consensus entails, but still a programme of work that will ultimately break the deadlock. Our taxpayers and the international community cannot continue to accept our stubborn impasse because of procedural reasons or minor language issues.

We must now send out a positive message, a message of hope, and put an end to the deadlock with a determination to work towards restoring the negotiating mandate of the Conference. We will not be able to start negotiating now, but with your proposal, we will create a space of trust and dialogue that will enable us to return to the negotiating table soon.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Spain and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Mr. President, I would like first of all to welcome the very encouraging announcement made by the distinguished representatives of the United States and the Russian Federation at the outset of this session.

Japan has issued the following statement made by our Foreign Minister, Mr. Motegi Toshimitsu, outlining our position on this matter.

The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which regulates, among others, the reduction of nuclear warheads and their delivery vehicles, represents important progress in nuclear disarmament by the United States and Russia. Japan welcomes the five-year extension of the Treaty. Japan expresses strong hope that this progress will lead to the development of a broader framework of arms control, involving not only the United States and Russia, but other countries as well, and covering a wide range of weapon systems. Japan believes that this extension will also contribute to the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, expected to be held in August this year.

As the only country to have suffered atomic bombing during the Second World War, Japan has the responsibility to take the lead in the efforts of the international community to realize a world without nuclear weapons. Coordinating with the new United States administration, Japan will not spare any efforts to steadily advance towards the realization of that goal.

I end the quote from the statement made by our Foreign Minister, Mr. Motegi Toshimitsu.

As for the revised package related to a programme of work, I highly appreciate the efforts made by our President to establish a new way in order to advance our substantive work in this august body. Japan is ready to show flexibility and support any initiatives that may facilitate substantive work and pave the way to multilateral disarmament negotiations. And Japan calls upon all the member States to show their flexibility and political will so that the Conference can adopt a basis for its substantive work at the earliest possible moment, as emphasized by the President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan and I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Mr. Spindler (Hungary): Mr. President, as this is the first time I have taken the floor under your presidency, let me congratulate you on your assumption of this demanding responsibility.

Hungary welcomes the agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty for an additional five years. The Treaty is an essential element of European and global security. Its extension gives positive impetus to the preparation of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as well. Hungary hopes that the current agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation will provide a solid basis for further reductions in nuclear weapons.

About the package put forward by the six Presidents of this year's session, we are pleased to offer our support and flexibility.

The President: I thank the representative of Hungary and I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our delegation has studied the revised draft distributed by the Secretariat to member States last Friday. A number of the amendments to the first draft that we submitted in writing have been incorporated, but the main concerns expressed by our delegation remain in the revised draft. In this context, my delegation would like to make the following observations on the revised draft:

Firstly, with regard to the procedural aspect, my delegation does not believe that a package of documents was the best option. The discussions at last year's session confirmed that the continued failure to respond to substantive proposals relating to the mandate of the Conference and an equal approach to the mandates of the subsidiary bodies prevented consensus. Accordingly, we believe that, at this stage, the debate should focus on reaching a consensus on the elements of a programme of work for the session and a decision in this regard. My delegation believes that making the adoption of the programme of work conditional on procedural issues is unacceptable. It goes without saying that revitalizing and reactivating the work of the Conference requires the beginning of a consensus on its programme of work, and this is the crux of the issue. As we have said in the past, procedural issues are not an obstacle to the Conference moving forward. The Conference already managed to complete the negotiation of important instruments in the past under the current procedural rules when there was the political will to do so.

Secondly, we have concerns about attempts to distance the Conference from its mandate as the only multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament issues and to turn its mandate into a deliberative one. We see no need to do this just to give the impression that the Conference is working, especially given the existence of deliberative bodies such as the First Committee of the General Assembly. We have therefore made amendments to the title of the draft decision and to the third operative paragraph. We see a contradiction between the title of the document, which includes the establishment of subsidiary bodies, and its content. If the current title of the draft decision is to be maintained, the mandate granted to subsidiary bodies must be to negotiate legal instruments. With regard to the title, we reiterate our suggestion that it should refer only to the establishment of subsidiary bodies, without mentioning the programme of work. We therefore propose reformulating the title of the decision to read: "Draft decision on the establishment of subsidiary bodies".

Thirdly, we propose an additional paragraph that would become the second preliminary paragraph in the draft decision, taken from the decision on the establishment of subsidiary bodies for 2018, as contained in document CD/2119. The paragraph reads:

(*spoke in English*)

"noting that it provides its member States with a platform to engage in negotiations, on the basis of the rule of consensus".

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Fourthly, in the third operative paragraph, the new wording is unacceptable because it has weakened even further the mandate of the subsidiary bodies mentioned in the previous draft, whose wording was already weak. Here in the third operative paragraph, we reiterate our proposal to replace the words:

(spoke in English)

“effective measures” and “This may include discussion of legally binding instruments”

(spoke in Arabic)

with the language used in the decision on the establishment of the subsidiary bodies in 2018. That was the last document adopted by the Conference by consensus on the subject. The paragraph would then read:

(spoke in English)

“The aim of the subsidiary bodies established under this decision will be to consider and recommend the nature and scope of legal instruments for negotiations, in line with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. To this end, the subsidiary bodies may deepen technical discussion and broaden areas of agreement.” The paragraph would then continue as it is.

(spoke in Arabic)

Fifthly, the approach mentioned in the eighth operative paragraph on the organization of future annual sessions of the Conference has not yet proved effective, and we cannot decide that this will be the approach used from now on to organize future sessions of the Conference. We therefore suggest replacing this paragraph with the following paragraph:

(spoke in English)

“This decision is taken for the 2021 session, without prejudice to any subsequent decision taken at the beginning of the next annual session of the Conference on Disarmament.”

(spoke in Arabic)

Sixthly, with regard to the second draft decision, which names the heads of the subsidiary bodies and establishes their timetables, my delegation would like to emphasize that there should be an equal approach to all proposed subsidiary bodies in terms of substance and timetables. My delegation therefore proposes the following:

One: deleting the reference to the programme of work from the title because of the contradiction we referred to earlier. The title would simply be “draft decision” so that, upon adoption, it would become a “decision” without any other additions.

Two: retaining the reference to subsidiary bodies with the text of the items on the agenda contained in document CD/WP.630, adopted by the Conference at the beginning of the current session. We therefore support the adoption of language similar to that contained in CD/2126.

Seventhly, Syria does not support the presidential statement on procedural issues and does not see it as a priority at this stage. We emphasize that the priority should be to focus on the substantive programme of work.

These are our observations on the revised drafts and our delegation will provide them to the Secretariat in writing.

The President: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Canada.

Ms. Norton (Canada): Canada welcomes the news that the Russian Federation and the United States of America have formally extended the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty agreement for five years. As one of the many countries that has encouraged the extension of the Treaty, Canada is pleased to see the two parties in accord. We hope that this positive development sets the stage for progress on broader nuclear arms control and disarmament issues among the nuclear-weapon States, particularly given the upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

On the package, I would like to say, as did my colleague, the President of the Conference on Disarmament, that a delicate balance was sought in the present revised document, and the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference hope that it has been

achieved. We therefore look forward to hearing the comments and views of all the other delegations.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Canada and I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal, who will speak on behalf of the European Union.

Ms. Homolková (Portugal): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and would like to read out the statement made by High Representative Josep Borrell on the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

The European Union welcomes the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty for an additional five years. The European Union attaches the highest importance to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and regards it as a crucial contribution to international and European security. The reduction of deployed strategic nuclear arsenals under the Treaty, enhanced notably by its robust verification mechanism, contributes to the implementation of article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty through the overall reduction of the global stockpile of deployed nuclear weapons. By increasing predictability and mutual confidence among the two largest nuclear-weapon States, this treaty limits strategic competition and increases strategic stability. The European Union stresses the need to preserve and further advance general arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation processes. Recalling the obligations on all nuclear-weapon States arising from article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, we underline that the two nuclear-weapon States with the largest arsenals hold a special responsibility in the area of nuclear disarmament and arms control. We encourage them to seek further reductions to their arsenals, including strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons, and to pursue further discussions on confidence-building, transparency, risk reduction, including strategic and nuclear risk reduction measures, and verification activities, laying the ground for even more robust future arms control agreements and reporting. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the increased transparency shown by some nuclear-weapon States on their doctrines and the nuclear weapons they possess and calls on others to do likewise.

The President: I thank the representative of the European Union and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): My delegation is very grateful for the statements made just now by the distinguished Ambassadors of the United States and the Russian Federation. The United Kingdom warmly welcomes the decision to extend the New START, which we have long supported. We value the Treaty for its contribution to international security, strategic stability, transparency and the building of trust. We are glad to see the Treaty and its robust verification mechanism continue.

Building on the spirit of cooperation fostered by the extension of the New START, we also support wider United States efforts to engage on new arms control challenges. Since the New START was agreed in 2011, the global security context has changed, including with the development of new strategic and other weapons, their systems not covered by any arms control agreement. As the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has said, allies see the Treaty's extension as the beginning, not the end, of an effort to address nuclear threats and new and emerging challenges to strategic stability. The United Kingdom will continue to work closely with the United States and our other allies and partners to address this issue.

Mr. President, while I have the floor, I will take up your invitation to respond to the revised package related to a programme of work for our 2021 session. Allow me again to thank you and the other Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference for your tireless efforts to find a way of structuring and directing our work. My delegation strongly supports your efforts and, while recognizing that the package is not perfect for anyone, believes that there should be no impediments to adopting your proposal contained in document CD/WP.632 as a way of restarting our substantive work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom and I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Işilak (Turkey): Mr. President, we welcome and support the decision of the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty for five years. The Treaty, which limits the nuclear capabilities of the United States and the Russian Federation, is of global significance as the last agreement that ensures strategic stability between the two countries. We hope that this important step will contribute to the efforts to strengthen the arms control regime and have a positive impact on the process, towards a successful outcome of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Mr. President, I would like to thank you and the other Presidents of the 2021 session for the revised draft package. The establishment of the subsidiary bodies may eventually pave the way for the beginning of substantive negotiations at the Conference. We believe that we should not give up on attempts to restart the negotiations. As we have declared in advance, Turkey supports the draft package.

Having said that, we would like to underline that the task of the facilitator will be to hold informal open-ended consultations with the Conference on Disarmament members on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. In other words, the coordinator's mandate will be limited to the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament. Other issues, like the enlargement of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament, will not fall under the coordinator's mandate.

The President: I thank the representative of Turkey and I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, my delegation welcomes the fact that, yesterday, the Governments of the United States and the Russian Federation agreed to extend the New START for five years. The extension of the Treaty is undoubtedly a major achievement in the two countries' bilateral non-proliferation and arms control relations. But, above all, it is the breath of fresh air that the international security architecture in general, and this Conference in particular, needed to survive the various setbacks that they have endured in recent years. The extension of the New START is a development that renews our hopes of reviving the substantive work of this Conference, since it serves as a source of inspiration for all members at a time when the Conference requires flexibility and political will more than ever. Last but not least, my delegation hopes that the greater stability, transparency and predictability that this extension brings to the global security architecture will assist the work of all States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons during the upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty and serve to promote the confidence required for a successful outcome.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina and I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Maayan (Israel): Mr. President, we would like to welcome the announcement of the extension to the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty to 2026. We recognize that direct dialogue between the United States and the Russian Federation allowed the two sides to reach an agreement on extending this important arms control treaty, which will serve to achieve a shared goal of enhancing global security and stability.

The President: I thank the representative of Israel and I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Hill (Australia): My delegation would like to join others in welcoming the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation. Since its entry into force in 2011, the Treaty has played a critical role in reducing and limiting the nuclear arsenals of both countries. The decision to extend it for a further five years will bolster strategic stability and confidence. The extension is consistent with the obligations of both countries under the cornerstone Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is also a demonstration of the political will and cooperation that will be required for a successful Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons this year. Australia encourages nuclear-weapon States in particular to take further practical steps of this kind to enhance peace and stability on the pathway to the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, turning to the draft package, my delegation would like to thank you again for your work and that of all the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference on the draft package. We think that the package represents a good way forward for the work of the Conference on Disarmament this year and we are pleased to support it. We hope that all delegations will demonstrate flexibility and a spirit of compromise in their consideration of the package so that we can move quickly to adopt it.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia. I now give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Nikolaichik (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of Belarus welcomes the entry into force of the agreement to extend the operation of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms. We regard this international treaty as a cornerstone of the international security architecture and hope that its extension will represent a turning point, halting the erosion of arms control and non-proliferation mechanisms.

We wish to express our gratitude and support to the Russian Federation and the United States of America for their responsible decision, which is aimed at supporting global stability and security.

We believe that the Conference could follow this example of differences being successfully overcome for the sake of a higher common purpose and will be able to approach the adoption of a programme of work in a similar manner.

In this regard, in response to the President's invitation to delegations to cover all issues in a single statement, I would also like to express my support for the President's efforts to find a compromise on the programme of work. As a member of the enlarged Bureau of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, Belarus supports the proposed package of documents, which builds on the efforts made by last year's Presidents and has been supplemented by the joint efforts that we have made this year, and calls on the Conference to find a common understanding on this package as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Müller (Austria): Mr. President, I would like, first of all, to welcome the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation on extending the New START for an additional five years. Building on the statement made by the High Representative of the European Union, Austria also attaches the highest importance to the New START and regards it as a crucial contribution to international and European security. Its robust verification mechanism contributes to the implementation of article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We also stress the need to further advance general arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation processes and, in this context, would like to recall the obligations on all nuclear-weapon States arising from article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We would also welcome swift negotiations on a broader follow-up agreement and we welcome the remarks of the United States and the Russian Federation in this regard.

Now, turning to the package: first of all, I would like to welcome your approach in coming up with the revised text which, in our reading, contains certain improvements. Speaking frankly, we might have wanted to see stronger language in the new paragraph 3 of the draft decision, on working towards legally binding instruments. But, as you rightly said, we are not here to negotiate a treaty and it is clear that this draft package will not be considered a gem of poetry, but it is something that really should help the Conference on Disarmament to get back to business as soon as possible. So I would like to express our full support for your new proposal and take the opportunity to thank all the ambassadors who volunteered to lead the subsidiary body work, as well as the facilitator. I think we also owe them our gratitude for their readiness to take on this work.

Lastly, I think that this package contains nothing that might be problematic for any of the members of this body and so, in the interests of all of us, I would appeal to all those

delegations who might not see this as a perfect text to give it a try, to support the presidency and the efforts of the six Presidents of this year's session.

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

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, as this is the first time that I am taking the floor under your presidency, I would like to personally congratulate you on assuming that role. I would like to thank you for the excellent work that you and your team have been doing. We appreciate that, despite the difficult circumstances imposed on us by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, you have made it possible to renew our work in the Conference on Disarmament, for which we are grateful, and we now have a draft programme of work on the table, which we welcome.

We also thank you for the intensive bilateral consultations that you are holding with all delegations, which we appreciate is a serious effort on your part to achieve a tangible outcome from your work. Cuba considers it essential that we should achieve a broad and comprehensive programme of work that addresses the key substantive issues on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. It is vital that we fulfil our mandate, which is to negotiate binding legal instruments, and that we avoid politicizing the Conference on Disarmament or turning it into a body for deliberating disarmament affairs, because that mandate belongs to other bodies within the United Nations system.

We repeat that, in our view, the core mandate of the Conference on Disarmament is, according to its constituent documents, to negotiate legally binding instruments. Having said that, we would like to refer directly to the programme of work, in respect of which we have three preliminary observations that we would like to share with you and the other delegations. First of all, I note with thanks that the new version is closer to the delicate balance of ideas that was presented last year under the Algerian presidency and that could bring us nearer to a possible understanding that would enable us to move forward with our work. I would, nevertheless, point out that paragraph 7 of this draft programme of work is, in our view, fundamentally flawed, in that it states that the possible agreements reached or progress made by the subsidiary bodies will be submitted by the coordinators through the President, so that, logically, they may be duly reflected in the report of the Conference on Disarmament. We believe that some important language is missing here, namely "for approval". In other words, we believe that the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies should submit any possible outcome to the President of the Conference on Disarmament, in accordance with the rules of the Conference, but that would be for the approval of the Conference. Thus, in our view, it is not enough for a document to be adopted by consensus by the subsidiary bodies for the Conference on Disarmament to have to duly reflect it in its report. In our opinion, any progress made or agreement reached by a subsidiary body has to be formally approved in the Conference on Disarmament.

I believe that the change requested by our delegation is not particularly significant. It is in line with the rules of procedure and would involve stating, in paragraph 7, that these reports or possible agreements are to be submitted to the Conference on Disarmament for approval with a view to their being duly reflected in the report of the Conference.

The second preliminary observation that we received from our capital is that, although the subsidiary bodies are not the ideal mechanism, since, as past experience has shown, they bring us closer to deliberative, rather than substantive, negotiations, we believe that it is important, to the extent possible and depending on the consensus that must be reached with all the delegations, to strengthen the wording of this draft decision in order to reinforce the idea of the Conference's mandate being to negotiate legally binding instruments. Clearly, the programme of work is not that kind of instrument, but I must say that our work is moving in that direction. In this regard – and this is the consideration that my delegation would like to share with you, Mr. President, with your permission, of course, and on the assumption that we adopt this draft programme of work – my question would be: what do we have in mind for the subsidiary bodies? In our experience, subsidiary bodies normally go through a deliberation phase, during which the delegations exchange ideas, which we see as something productive, although it is not the core mandate of the Conference on Disarmament; but in the end, the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies present and negotiate – which is a rather

complex task – an outcome of the work to be submitted to the Conference on Disarmament at a later stage or to be reflected in the report of the Conference.

I ask you this because, on this point, open, transparent and inclusive negotiations are necessary and, unfortunately, virtual meetings such as the present one make the exercise overly difficult. That is to say, I wanted to enquire of you, and perhaps even of some of the ambassadors to whom we are grateful for offering to coordinate, what exactly would be the plan if a programme of work were to be adopted. If that were to happen, I understand that the subsidiary bodies would end up having to engage in highly complex negotiations, which, in the opinion of our delegation, could not be carried out in a virtual format, but would require at least a hybrid component.

Our delegation would like to seek clarification on that point and on financial matters, because we were surprised last year that, at some point, the Conference on Disarmament simply did not have the money to meet, and it is not clear to me whether, this year, a programme of work like this, with virtual and hybrid meetings, would be covered by the budget. I am not a financial expert, which is why I was surprised last year. To me, these virtual meetings should really save money. For example, right now, in the meetings of the Group of 21, we are not making use of interpretation services, so we are not paying for them, which should increase the budget. But since we ran out of funds at some point last year, I would also like to have clarity as to whether our budget will cover the ambitious programme of work that we are proposing and allow us, at some point in the negotiations, to start holding hybrid meetings, if necessary, or face-to-face meetings, which would be ideal.

A third point – and excuse me for speaking for so long, Mr. President – is purely technical and, as a lawyer, I feel obliged to bring it to your attention. The package has been presented to the Conference on Disarmament as a working document. I understand that this was done essentially to reflect all the progress made under the Algerian presidency and those that followed, but I do not think that this is the best way of adopting a document. Document CD/WP.632 contains two decisions and a presidential statement. They are essentially three different things and, in our view, the presidential decision or statement, made in order to reach agreement on procedural matters, does not have the same importance or standing as the two decisions. I believe that the observations made by some delegations are valid but, technically, the two draft decisions should be kept separate from the presidential statement. They cannot be adopted under the same decision, because I believe that would be sending the wrong message.

Mr. President, in conclusion, and in response to your invitation, allow us to welcome the extension of the New START by the United States and Russia, a decision of vital importance in the area of disarmament that we hope will reverse the destructive spiral in which we have found ourselves in recent years. I would also like to take this opportunity to add my voice to the congratulations on the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. I believe that both milestones reached this year allow us to focus our efforts on what our delegation believes should be our highest aspiration, which is to have a world free of nuclear weapons.

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

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): It is with great satisfaction and relief that we received the news about the successful extension of the New START. Against the negative trend of the past years, this is a positive development which we very much welcome and support. It sends out an important signal for the year 2021, which I described in my opening remarks in the Conference on Disarmament two weeks ago as a watershed year for international security, arms control and disarmament.

With the extension, the New START remains a crucial pillar in the global arms control and disarmament architecture. It also paves the way for its further development, which is very much needed, notably in light of the growing arsenals of some nuclear Powers. We therefore see the extension as an important first step, not the end of a process, but we feel encouraged by the return of a new and positive dynamic. This is all the more important in light of the upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-

Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as it clearly demonstrates that negative trends can be reversed through political goodwill.

This political goodwill can also be demonstrated in the Conference on Disarmament as we are about to discuss the draft programme of work for this year, an exercise which for the past 24 years ended in endless but fruitless discussions without the desired outcome. Let us break this vicious circle this time and show that progress is possible in this body too. Let me reassure you, Mr. President, that my delegation will not stand in the way of its adoption, in its recently updated version, for which you have our full support.

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

Mr. Vogelaar (Netherlands): Mr. President, I wish to join others in welcoming the decision by the Russian Federation and the United States of America to extend the New START for another five years. Although it is a bilateral treaty, the New START makes an important contribution to European and international security, as well as strategic stability.

That is why my delegation has in the past repeatedly fought for its extension in this and other forums. We welcome this important decision and hope that it is the start of further positive steps in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. We encourage consultations on possible further reductions in nuclear weapons systems, including deployed and non-deployed, strategic and non-strategic weapons, with a view to reaching broader follow-on arms control measures.

In a similar vein, we hope that this important step will provide new impetus to the process being pursued by the nuclear-weapon States, known as the P5 process, and ongoing discussions on strategic stability in that framework. Further progress on confidence-building, transparency, risk reduction, including strategic and nuclear risk reduction measures, and verification activities should help lay the ground for even more robust arms control agreements in the near future.

Returning to the revised package on the table, I can be very brief. The Netherlands supported the initial draft and we also support this revised draft.

My delegation has long called for a more pragmatic approach in the Conference, focusing on the substance of our agenda. In this context, it is important to note that neither our rules of procedure nor the outcome document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament either limit the scope or prescribe the form of disarmament measures to be negotiated by the Conference on Disarmament on the basis of its agenda.

If we do not start on the work that forms the substance of our agenda, we will never reach a point at which the Conference on Disarmament can make an informed decision on the scope or form of the needed disarmament measures.

The President: I thank the representative of the Netherlands and I now give the floor to the representative of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, China congratulates the United States of America and the Russian Federation on extending the New START in time. After the change of administration in the United States, that country responded to the initiative of the Russian Federation and rapidly reached an agreement on the unconditional extension of the New START, and the two sides carried out their respective domestic procedures in a timely manner. This fully reflects the fact that the unconditional renewal of this important bilateral nuclear disarmament treaty is the only correct choice. It is in line with the common interests of the United States and the Russian Federation and it helps to maintain global strategic stability. As the countries with the largest nuclear arsenals, the United States and the Russian Federation, in accordance with the international community's long-held consensus, are continuing to take practical steps to implement their special and primary responsibility for nuclear disarmament and to further substantially reduce their nuclear stockpiles on the basis of the extension of the New START. This is in line with the expectations of the entire international community and will create the conditions required for the total and complete eradication of nuclear weapons.

China hopes to engage, on the basis of parity and mutual respect, in bilateral dialogue with the nuclear-weapon States, including the United States and the Russian Federation, to build mutual trust on strategic security issues. It is prepared to actively carry out discussions and cooperate in multilateral mechanisms such as the process pursued by the nuclear-weapon States, known as the P5 process, the review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Conference, to work to maintain global strategic stability, to promote international peace and security and to move the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation process forward.

With regard to your latest draft, Mr. President, we believe that your efforts build upon the Conference's work of the past two years and, in the light of this year's special circumstances, are a new attempt to allow the Conference to carry out its proceedings smoothly this year. The Chinese delegation stands ready to listen carefully to the views of all parties on this draft and will strive to form a working arrangement acceptable to all at an early date.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China and I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, regarding the decision of the Russian Federation and the United States to extend the New START, my delegation views this new development as simply maintaining the current undesirable status quo, and definitely not compensating for the damage that the United States has inflicted on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I use this opportunity to call on the United States Administration to return to full compliance with its disarmament obligations.

Mr. President, regarding the programme of work, the Islamic Republic of Iran attaches great importance to the role and the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral negotiation body devoted to disarmament, in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. We therefore believe that it is the responsibility of the Conference on Disarmament members to prevent any attempt which might divert the Conference from its core mandate or turn this body into a deliberative body.

Iran made it clear during our first bilateral consultations with you, Mr. President, that the idea of the package belongs to the 2020 session. We do not subscribe to the notion of adopting the proposed draft document as a package, as that is unacceptable. The rules of procedure provide for the Conference to consider and adopt its programme of work, not a package, and the idea is unprecedented in the Conference on Disarmament. This is the second year that we have witnessed such a deviation from the main mandate of the Conference on Disarmament, and we do not see any added value in repeating that failed experiment, which is based on the proposal of one delegation.

We believe that the focus must be exclusively on the programme of work, a programme of work that will enable the Conference to start negotiations on the core issues of its agenda, particularly nuclear disarmament. We believe that should be the top priority of our activities. In this regard, we shared our comments regarding the substance of the programme of work with you last Friday, Mr. President. And I use this opportunity to thank you and your team for the consultations. If you allow me, I would like to briefly to refer to the proposal and comments that we shared with you.

The first category of comments concerns preserving the role of the Conference on Disarmament in accordance with its mandate. The second relates to adopting a balanced and comprehensive programme of work regarding the four core issues. That is why we proposed particularly that the focus of operative paragraph 3 should be on negotiating elements of legally binding instruments and their scope, and should not dilute or reduce the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament.

Our second proposal concerned operative paragraph 7, and the idea that the reports of the coordinator of the subsidiary bodies should be presented to the Conference on Disarmament through the President for adoption and be duly reflected in the annual reports, as suggested by other delegations. On operative paragraphs 3 and 8 of the revised draft, we should not prejudge the future sessions and decisions of the Conference on Disarmament and

so we suggest that these decisions should apply only to the 2021 session. We have other proposals regarding operative paragraphs 2 and 3, which we have shared with you previously.

We believe that a balanced approach should always be maintained when we are dealing with subsidiary bodies. That is why we propose that the agenda items should replicate those shown in document CD/WP.630 when we are talking about the mandate of the subsidiary bodies.

The President: I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran and I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kapustin (Ukraine): Mr. President, the Ukrainian delegation would also like to commend the efforts that you and your team have made, despite the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We support you in your ambition to search further for common grounds regarding the programme of work. We appreciate your tireless efforts to bring to fruition the result-oriented approach reflected in the revised draft decision contained in document CD/WP.632 and believe that the way forward you propose is the right way to tackle the current situation, building on the deliberations and conclusions of the previous presidencies.

In this regard, my delegation believes that the draft programme of work prepared by the Belgian presidency, which strives to include the priorities and interests of all member States, is a good basis for our further deliberations. We consider that it offers a realistic balance and a comprehensive approach towards achieving our shared aspiration – the resumption of substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament.

Ukraine's position on the Conference's work in the future is that it should pay equal attention to disarmament and non-proliferation issues. Carrying out parallel negotiation processes on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices and on negative security assurances would meet today's urgent needs.

We support starting such negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty in accordance with document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. This would not only help to build confidence at the regional and global levels, but would also provide a balanced approach to the development of a comprehensive nuclear disarmament process.

Given that time is running out fast, Ukraine is generally flexible regarding the structure of the proposed revised draft decision. At the same time, we see the value of having all issues relevant to our work in the Conference contained on the proposed page. That said, my delegation will not stand in the way of consensus on the matter.

Mr. President, having been in your shoes two years ago, we are aware of the difficult task that the presidency has in trying to accommodate often contradicting national views and the positions of certain States. Thus, we are ready to further engage with you and with other member States to address the remaining issues. The Ukrainian delegation is willing to continue our constructive cooperation in order to arrive at a consensus decision as soon as possible.

The President: I thank the representative of Ukraine and we will now go to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. September (South Africa): I would like to begin by joining other delegations in welcoming the announcement that was made regarding the extension of the New START agreement.

Mr. President, South Africa is of the view that the continued impasse in the Conference on Disarmament is not sustainable and will increasingly affect the relevance and stature of, and international confidence in, the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. To restore confidence, we need to find compromises that would allow the Conference to resume its substantive work and regain its position as a responsive, responsible, multilateral institution that can effectively contribute towards building a new consensus on matters affecting our common security.

During the sessions of the Conference on Disarmament over the past three years, South Africa maintained a principled position against the establishment of the subsidiary

bodies. Our position was geared towards ensuring that the Conference on Disarmament should deliver on its mandate, which is to negotiate legally binding instruments. Any attempt to dilute the negotiating mandate of the Conference on Disarmament is therefore a matter of great concern.

It will be recalled that, in 2020, South Africa indicated that it would reluctantly support the decision to establish subsidiary bodies again in 2021. Members will recall that, at the time, we stated that we do not want to institutionalize subsidiary bodies. We would only meet in informal settings.

Mr. President, our view remains that the continued inability of the Conference on Disarmament to reach a consensus on a programme of work is of immense concern and the idea of alternatives such as subsidiary bodies that would only meet in an informal setting is equally concerning. We know that repeated activities in the past have not brought the Conference closer to any agreement on a programme of work. South Africa would therefore like to seek clarification on whether the meetings of the subsidiary bodies will only be conducted in informal settings.

Regarding your draft decision on a programme of work, Mr. President, South Africa would like to propose that the language of paragraph 3 should read as follows:

The aim of the subsidiary bodies established under this decision will be to consider and recommend effective measures in line with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, including legally binding instruments for negotiations.

South Africa is of the view that the proposed change in language will follow on logically from paragraph 2, which reads as follows:

To establish, in accordance with rule 23 of its rules of procedure, four subsidiary bodies on agenda items 1 to 4, and a fifth subsidiary body on agenda items 5, 6 and 7, with a particular focus of substantial elements of legally binding instruments, and additional measures, and options for negotiation.

In closing, Mr. President, let me assure you that the South African delegation remains flexible, as in the past. We look forward to working with you and wish to assure you of our delegation's continued cooperation and support in the execution of the Conference's mandate.

We would therefore like to thank you for your efforts to move the work of the Conference on Disarmament forward, which would be greatly assisted by the adoption of a programme of work.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Mr. President, as we know, many members have called for a pragmatic approach and a sensible way forward. As you are also aware, perhaps an even larger number in the Conference on Disarmament has stressed the importance of comprehensiveness and balance being maintained. Yet, despite these collective challenges, the willingness expressed by members to resume substantive discussions at the Conference on Disarmament is a hopeful sign. It is all the more imperative, therefore, that we treat this hope with pragmatism and balance in order to have a real chance of realizing this opportunity.

Mr. President, that would begin with reflecting this call for a comprehensive and balanced approach in the documents in a way that takes the Conference on Disarmament forward. The current draft, in our view, has yet to factor in this integral component.

If creative drafting were a solution to the larger challenges that shaped the work of the Conference on Disarmament, we would not have seen the past two decades unfold as they have done. Attempts to reflect the subjective priorities of a few misleading notions of correctness have continued to hamstring the Conference.

Now these repeated calls appear as a diversion, preventing the Conference from focusing on its highest priority of pursuing nuclear disarmament. Mr. President, the Conference cannot afford to remain an echo chamber in perpetuity. It cannot continue to be

viewed as accommodating the interests of only a few. There is therefore an urgent need to dispel these perceptions, if the Conference is to deliver.

Mr. President, the unbalanced treatment of subsidiary body 2 detracts from the pragmatic approach which you aim to be pursuing. It is therefore essential that we ensure equal treatment and equal preference for each agenda item, and that remains a high priority.

Mr. President, there have been views expressed on operative paragraphs 1 and 2 of your initial draft. We support the streamlining changes you have made to the two paragraphs, which are now operative paragraphs 2 and 3 in the current version. However, we do not see the need to repeat language from operative paragraph 2 in the new operative paragraph 3. All options have been exhaustively listed in operative paragraph 2 and we would support the deletion of the new sentence added in operative paragraph 3 in the current version to avoid redundancy.

And finally, delegations that have spoken to operative paragraph 7 have again pointed out the need for clarity; we echo what Cuba and others have suggested in respect of adding the words “for adoption”.

Mr. President, we should therefore aim for the doable and the reachable. It also remains crucial that we should address the legitimate concerns of all delegations. In our view, a comprehensive and balanced approach remains fundamental.

One clarification we would request from you, Mr. President, is in terms of the process, or the road map ahead, as we know there is not much clarity on the modalities going forward. We would appreciate it if you would share with us how you plan to proceed in terms of presenting your proposal and the further work that we hope can begin in subsidiary bodies. So our preference remains for a hybrid format, but we would welcome any thoughts that you might have.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan. I now give the floor to the representative of France.

Ms. Delaroche (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the decision of the United States and Russia to extend the New START for five years and aligns itself with the statement of the High Representative of the European Union. In her statement of 27 January, the spokeswoman for the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs emphasized that the New START is a pillar of the international nuclear arms control and disarmament architecture. A contributor to strategic stability, it is the last instrument remaining in force that limits the capabilities of the United States and Russia, which still account for nearly 90 per cent of the world’s nuclear weapons stockpile. Its extension is therefore a very positive signal in the run-up to the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. France reiterates its commitment to ensuring that the extension of the New START is swiftly followed by the establishment of an ambitious and more global arms control and strategic stability agenda. Europeans, who are the first concerned, will have to play an active role in determining the parameters needed to strengthen security and stability in Europe.

Mr. President, we thank you wholeheartedly for the revised package and the efforts made to reflect the views expressed by the member States of the Conference. France would have preferred to see more ambitious language on subsidiary body 2 to reflect the urgency of negotiating a treaty banning the production of fissile material for military purposes on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. At the same time, we recognize that this draft package represents a very delicate balance between the aspirations and priorities of the various members of the Conference in accordance with the Conference’s rules of procedure and mandate, and we stand ready to give it our full support. We encourage all member States to do the same so that, in the words of the President, we can open the door to the conference room.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): First of all, Mr. President, let me thank you again for your efforts to enable the adoption of a programme of work for the 2021

session of the Conference and for the revised draft decision that you have submitted for our consideration.

As I indicated last week in the general exchange of views, we welcome the main thrust of this draft and its various provisions. This draft represents a pragmatic attempt to get us back to work, or in other words, as you yourself said this morning in your opening remarks, to open the doors of the Conference in the knowledge that the situation is not yet ripe for us to agree on the launch of negotiations on a treaty dealing with one of the topics on our agenda. This approach allows us to focus on substance and move gradually towards the launch of negotiations in the strict sense of the word.

We are grateful for the various amendments that you have made to the draft decision in response to the comments of some delegations and to facilitate its adoption. For our part, we can support this draft as it stands. We hope that the Conference will be able to conclude its consideration of this draft decision quickly and approve it. My delegation would also like to point out the following: we are convinced that the approach that you are proposing does not in any way change the nature of the Conference and does not make it a deliberative body. On the contrary, its purpose is to enable the commencement of negotiations by facilitating the necessary discussions prior to the adoption of a mandate to that effect.

The proposed approach is even less contrary to the mandate of the Conference as it in fact simply mirrors the way in which the Conference handled its programme of work over a long period of time, namely the period in which it was most productive.

Before concluding, allow me, like other speakers, to welcome the announcement made earlier this morning by the United States and the Russian Federation regarding the extension of the New START for a period of five years. This is a positive development that we have repeatedly called for. We hope that it will help to create the conditions for further progress in the field of nuclear disarmament.

The President: Thank you. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lim Sang-Beom (Republic of Korea): The Republic of Korea welcomes the agreement between the Governments of the United States and Russia to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty for five years. We are of the view that the extension of the Treaty will contribute to strengthening the global nuclear non-proliferation regime based on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as enhancing international peace and stability. We hope that the extension will further contribute to advancing discussions on arms control arrangements, taking due consideration of the changing global security environment.

With regard to the revised package proposal, we appreciate the efforts of the President and the other Presidents of this year's session, and I assure you of my delegation's flexibility and continued cooperation in the endeavour to reach a consensus and begin our discussions on substantive issues.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea. I still have several speakers on my list, so it seems that we will not be able to hear all of them this morning; we will therefore have to continue this afternoon. I would like, though, to take the two requests for the right of reply before adjourning.

I first give the floor to the Ambassador of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, I must take the floor to respond to the statement made by Ambassador Yuri Klymenko, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine, at one of the last plenary meetings.

We have to hand it to our Ukrainian colleague: he delivered a vivid and emotional statement, which could be used as a fine example of oratory in any textbook on diplomacy, were it not for one thing. I am referring to the substance of the statement, which represents the worst kind of manipulative diplomacy, based on misinterpreting well-known events, distorting observable facts, twisting assessments, name-calling and false messages and alarms. Advocates of this primitive form of diplomacy do not shy away from outright lies and baseless and arbitrary accusations.

There is no need to respond point by point to the attack launched by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine. The Russian delegation has always prioritized constructive and respectful dialogue over politicized showdowns that interfere with the work of our esteemed forum. This time, however, we have been obliged to request the floor to respond.

The distinguished Ambassador Klymenko has made yet another clumsy attempt to accuse Russia of aggression against his country, the fabled annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the south-eastern provinces of Ukraine. We have heard this many times before, and there is no point in saying that these accusations are false and serve only one purpose, namely to absolve the leadership of Ukraine, past and present, of responsibility for what has been happening in the country since early 2014.

As he was hurling these accusations, Ambassador Klymenko somehow shied away from saying that the return of Crimea to Russia was based on the free expression of the will of the peninsula's residents, 90 per cent of whom voted for secession from Ukraine and accession to Russia. The vote itself was a timely and healthy popular reaction to the descent of Ukraine into hard-line nationalism, Russophobia and extremism.

He also failed to mention the hundreds of thousands of refugees who were forced to leave the country and settle in Russia during the early years of the rule of the Banderite junta in Kyiv. It also slipped his mind that, in 2014, 4.5 million residents of Donetsk and Luhansk Provinces were declared to be terrorists by the authorities of Ukraine, and a counter-terrorism operation was launched against them, which, in nature and scope, amounted to a large-scale military operation to clear the area of its civilian population. This so-called "counter-terrorism operation" was accompanied by mass killings, executions, looting and the destruction of vital civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, kindergartens and schools. It was because of the inhumane orders of the leadership in Kyiv that thousands of peaceful inhabitants of Donetsk and Luhansk Provinces became victims of genocide after millions of rounds of lethal ammunition rained down upon them. Many of these facts have been documented by representatives of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

It is to the credit of Russia that a similar scenario was not enacted in Crimea.

Regrettably, the change of leadership in Kyiv has done little to alter the situation. Two once-flourishing provinces of Ukraine are essentially under siege, and their inhabitants continue to suffer because of continued acts of provocation, including the shelling of peaceful facilities and settlements. Since 2014, the political operators who have seized power in Kyiv have been waging a civil war that they themselves unleashed, depriving millions of Ukrainian citizens of the chance to live a normal, peaceful life.

Nor was anything said about the role played by Russia in the conclusion of the Minsk agreements, which prevented an escalation of the fratricidal war in south-eastern Ukraine. The Permanent Representative of Ukraine also left out of his statement the fact that, since the conclusion of these agreements of such momentous importance for his country, Kyiv has been shirking their implementation on various pretexts, inexplicably placing the blame for this on Russia, which, by the way, is not a party to them.

Let me turn now to the disarmament portion of the statement by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine. Of course, we ought not to have expected a balanced and sober analysis of the arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation situation from a representative of the authorities in Kyiv, which are not capable of providing an objective assessment of what is happening in their own country. But it seems that objectivity long ago ceased to be an integral part of Ukrainian diplomacy.

The general message of the statement by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine is straightforward: Russia is to blame for everything, be it the collapse of specific bilateral treaties, the undermining of multilateral conventions and non-compliance with them or the erosion of the system of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation agreements as a whole. It is unclear for whom such unsubstantiated claims, which have no basis whatsoever, are intended.

Russia has been and remains committed to all its obligations under the international treaties to which it is a party and is fully compliant with them. Moreover, over the past 30

years, our country has not only made consistent efforts to strengthen the regimes of these treaties but has also taken real steps to preserve some of them.

Allow me to recall that Russia initiated the process of adapting the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, attempted to ease concerns about the Intermediate-range and Shorter-range Missiles Treaty, beginning in the late 1990s, and proposed, in the mid-2000s, that the Treaty should be made multilateral. After the termination of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002, it was Russia that pushed for negotiations to resolve the resulting problems. It was Russia, together with China, that proposed the development of a multilateral treaty to keep near-Earth space free of weapons. Russia has supported and continues to support the idea of strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and has proposed specific measures to that end, including the development of a verification mechanism. I also wish to recall one of the latest initiatives led by Russia, namely a counter-moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles. I could go on listing our initiatives and proposals in various areas, but it would take up quite a bit of our time.

Let me note that it is not the fault of Russia that its efforts, proposals and initiatives have yet to yield the expected results or remain stalled. The reason is the position taken by vehement critics of Russia like the current leadership of Ukraine, which, for purely political reasons and contrary to all common sense, has opposed any Russian efforts and proposals in recent years. In this regard, the way in which the delegation of Ukraine voted on the draft resolutions submitted by Russia to the First Committee of the General Assembly is telling.

On a separate note, I would like to comment on the much-vaunted General Assembly resolution mentioned by our Ukrainian colleague, which condemns the military activities of Russia in Crimea and the waters of the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. This document is purely provocative and confrontational in character. Its main purpose is to call into question the legitimate and justifiable efforts made by Russia to guarantee the security of its citizens and protect the territorial integrity of the country. The military activities of Russia in this region are based on the principle of reasonable sufficiency for defence purposes and pose no threat to neighbouring States. I would like to stress in particular that the military measures that we are taking are a response to hostile rhetoric from irresponsible politicians in neighbouring States, an intensification of foreign military activities in the region and acts of provocation by our neighbours, such as the well-known incident involving the incursion of Ukrainian warships into Russian territorial waters.

In conclusion, I would like to note that statements such as that made by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine are a serious threat to the work of the Conference on Disarmament, where the atmosphere is already becoming tenser by the year. It is also surprising that, towards the end of his statement, which contained a call to distrust Russia, the Ambassador of Ukraine suddenly began talking about multilateralism, basing the forum's work on trust and the need for flexibility and efforts to find compromises. Is that not absurd?

The President: Thank you. I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor again, but I need to respond briefly in exercise of my right of reply to the comments made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Let me just make it very clear that the United States is in compliance with all of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, so the charge made by the representative of Iran is absurd, clearly politicized and simply not serious. It is Iran that is not in compliance with a number of its nuclear obligations.

The President: Thank you. That concludes this morning's meeting. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.