

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and sixty-seventh plenary meeting

Held via video conference on Friday, 26 March 2021, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Yuri Borissov Sterk (Bulgaria)



The President: I now call to order the 1567th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Before we proceed with our order of business for today, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to a new colleague who has assumed his responsibilities as representative of his Government to the Conference, Ambassador Abdul-Karim Hashim Mostafa, Permanent Representative of Iraq. I would like to take this opportunity to assure him of our full cooperation and support in his new assignments.

Distinguished colleagues, it is an honour for Bulgaria to take over the presidency of this Conference on Disarmament. I would like to propose that the order of business of our meeting this morning be as follows.

First, the delivery of my statement as President of the Conference, followed by a statement from Mr. James Cleverly, Member of Parliament and Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, as part of the high-level segment of the 2021 session of the Conference. Thereafter, I intend to present the plan of the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament for the remainder of our annual session, after which I will open the floor for any delegation that wishes to speak.

Distinguished colleagues, please allow me now to deliver a statement on the occasion of this first plenary under the presidency of Bulgaria.

Building on and continuing the diligent work and the relentless efforts of the previous, Belgian and Brazilian, presidencies of this Conference, whom we warmly thank for their efforts, and having conducted almost two weeks of intensive consultations with all regional groups and active stakeholders among our membership, I am finally compelled to come to the following regretful conclusion.

At present, conditions are not ripe for bringing the divergent positions of the member States close enough together to create the necessary common ground that would allow us to adopt a programme of work and start fulfilling our mandate in a structured and result-oriented way. One could be tempted to say that this is yet another opportunity missed. I, however, believe we should admit that this is the reality and we have to stand up and face it. Notwithstanding the saying that the purpose of archaeology is to uncover the unknown, while diplomacy is about covering the known, we now should assume our responsibility and make the maximum use of the remaining time of the 2021 session.

Against the backdrop of this reality, which is one of ever-growing international tensions and overall deterioration of the international security environment, we, the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference, believe that, under the current circumstances, the best way forward is to turn to thematic debates as a means of providing for more substantive work during this session.

Thank you for your kind attention.

The Conference will now hear an address an address from Mr. James Cleverly, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, as part of the high-level segment of the 2021 session of the Conference.

Mr. Cleverly (United Kingdom): Mr. President, it is a particular pleasure to address the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of Bulgaria, a friend and ally of the United Kingdom. As the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, the Conference has played a decisive role in developing the international legal framework on weapons of mass destruction, which makes the world safer. Today, I would like to brief the Conference on the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Foreign and Development Policy of the United Kingdom, which we published last week.

The Review is about building resilience at home and overseas; strengthening defence and security partnerships; contributing to scientific and technological innovation; and shaping the open international order of the future that will allow all countries, and all peoples, to be secure, prosperous and free.

Through all these objectives runs the enduring commitment of the United Kingdom to solving problems with our partners through multilateral channels. We are a European country with a uniquely global set of partnerships, capabilities and interests. And we want to

work with the entire international community towards mutual security and prosperity, and to establish the norms in the future frontiers of cyberspace, new technologies, data and space. The Conference on Disarmament has an important role to play.

Mr. President, our Integrated Review also serves as an official statement of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrence policy. We are clear that we intend to maintain our country's nuclear deterrent, for as long as we need it, as the ultimate guarantee of our security and that of our allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We are equally clear that we remain committed to, and will actively pursue, the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

The fundamental purpose of the nuclear weapons of the United Kingdom remains to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. And we remain committed to maintaining only the minimum destructive power needed, to guarantee that our nuclear deterrent remains credible and effective, against the full range of nuclear threats, from whichever direction.

This represents the continuation of our long-standing policy. But we are also adapting, to ensure that our nuclear deterrent remains aligned to the current realities. The nuclear security environment has deteriorated over the past decade and, as we look at the darkening global security picture, we place as much emphasis on the policy being "credible" as on the word "minimum".

In this context, the United Kingdom intends to increase the limit of our overall weapons stockpile from 225 to no more than 260 warheads. I must stress that this is a ceiling, not a target, and is not our current stockpile. We will continue to keep this under review in light of the international security environment.

The United Kingdom is committed to the principle of transparency, in both our nuclear doctrine and our capabilities, to the extent compatible with our national security considerations and non-proliferation obligations. But a measure of deliberate ambiguity contributes to strategic stability by complicating the calculations of potential aggressors, and by reducing the risk of deliberate nuclear use by those seeking a first strike advantage. Therefore, the United Kingdom remains deliberately ambiguous about precisely when, how and at what scale we would contemplate the use of our nuclear weapons. And we are extending this policy by no longer giving public figures for our operational stockpile, either for deployed warheads or deployed missile numbers.

We have also reviewed our country's unilateral negative security assurance. As has been the case for many years, the United Kingdom will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear-weapon State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This assurance does not apply to any State in material breach of those non-proliferation obligations.

Our Integrated Review makes it clear that we reserve the right to review this assurance, if the future threat of weapons of mass destruction – such as chemical and biological capabilities, or emerging technologies that could have a comparable impact – makes it necessary to do so.

Mr. President, let me be clear: we remain committed to multilateral disarmament and our shared long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The unequivocal undertaking of the United Kingdom, with the other nuclear-weapons States, to eliminate our nuclear arsenals persists; as do our obligations under article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. As such, the United Kingdom has taken, and will continue to take, a consistent and leading approach to nuclear disarmament.

The United Kingdom possesses the smallest stockpile of any nuclear State recognized under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and we are alone among those States in operating a single nuclear-weapon system. We also maintain our voluntary moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear explosive devices.

Building on these unilateral measures, we will continue to press for key steps towards multilateral disarmament. This includes the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-

Test-Ban Treaty and successful negotiations at this Conference on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The United Kingdom will continue to play a leading international role on nuclear disarmament verification, which is essential for achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons under strict and effective international control. We will also continue to work to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict resulting from misinterpretation and miscalculation, and to enhance mutual trust and security. We will champion strategic risk reduction and seek to create dialogue, both among States who possess nuclear weapons and between States who possess nuclear weapons and those who do not.

The road to a nuclear-weapon-free world will remain challenging. But we firmly believe that the best way – indeed, the only credible way – to get there is by a gradual, multilateral, negotiated, step-by-step approach within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Integrated Review explicitly commits the United Kingdom to doing just that. The United Kingdom takes its responsibilities as a nuclear-weapon State seriously, and will continue to encourage others to do the same.

Mr. President, the prevention of an arms race in outer space has been on the agenda of this Conference since the early 1980s and remains a core issue. Our Integrated Review recognizes the centrality of space systems to our security and prosperity. It also highlights the growing range of threats to space systems and the risk that those threats could lead to miscalculation and, in turn, escalation. The open international order must extend to outer space, to tackle these threats to international peace and security. General Assembly resolution 75/36 on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours in outer space, which the United Kingdom had the honour to lead, contributes to this goal. We will continue this important work as a way to manage and mitigate the perceptions of threat and avoid conflict.

Mr. President, let me also highlight some aspects of the Integrated Review that touch on the wider non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament picture.

We are determined to strengthen international prohibitions on the use of chemical and biological weapons. We are also determined to ensure accountability for those who use them – such as those responsible for the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, those responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Salisbury in 2018 and members of the Syrian regime responsible for the appalling use of chemical weapons against its own people. The Conference of States Parties which monitors the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention must take a stand against these incidents and against the Syrian regime's failure to accurately declare its chemical weapons programme.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has demonstrated the devastating effects of disease and the need to strengthen global biosecurity. The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of international efforts to ban biological weapons for decades. We will continue to champion ways of strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, at the forthcoming ninth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention.

We will also support global efforts, including through our leadership of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification under our presidency of the Group of Seven (G7), to protect our citizens from the risk of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

Our Integrated Review recognizes the extraordinary potential that technology has for global prosperity, to the benefit of all. But the exploitation and proliferation of new technology poses risks too, and we must work together to extend the international order to cover them, supplementing domestic controls and protections.

Our Integrated Review also makes it clear that the United Kingdom remains determined to prevent the destabilizing accumulation and illicit transfers of conventional weapons. We will work with our partners across the world to advocate for conventional arms control regimes, which reduce the likelihood of war and its humanitarian impact, including through our upcoming presidency of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Finally, the United Kingdom has now fulfilled its legal obligations to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, by clearing all landmines from the Falkland Islands, and we will continue to uphold our moral obligation to support mine action across the globe.

Mr. President, the Integrated Review puts multilateralism, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament at the heart of our approach to security. We recognize that, in order for all to succeed and prosper, it is no longer enough simply to defend the status quo; we must dynamically shape the international order of the future, extending it to the new frontiers of cyberspace, emerging technology and outer space. And it is vital that we protect democratic values as we do so.

The United Kingdom commits itself to continuing to work with you all, playing a constructive and creative role in this conference and in the wider multilateral disarmament machinery, in order to turn this vision into a reality.

The President: I thank Mr. Cleverly for his statement. I now wish to present the plan of the six Presidents for the remainder of the Conference on Disarmament's annual session.

Regarding the thematic debates: the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference have decided to address the seven agenda items on our agenda adopted at the beginning of this year's session. The Bulgarian presidency will schedule thematic debates on agenda item 1, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, and agenda item 2, prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters. The other agenda items and related thematic debates – item 3 on prevention of an arms race in outer space; item 4 on effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; item 5 on new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons, radiological weapons; item 6 on a comprehensive programme of disarmament; and item 7 on transparency in armaments – will be considered during the subsequent presidencies.

Depending on final confirmation of the dates of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, each subsequent presidency will provide precise information for the thematic debates it will schedule during its term and the respective dates for such debates. The main goal is to make the maximum use of the available resources and provide for substantive discussions on the topics on the Conference's agenda.

Regarding the thematic debates to be scheduled during the remaining time of the Bulgarian presidency, we are considering 11 May 2021 for the debate on agenda item 1, cessation on the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, and 18 May for the debate on agenda item 2, prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters.

Before giving the floor to delegations that have requested it, I would like to indicate that, in the spirit of allowing for constructive and respectful exchange in an effective manner today and for the duration of my presidency, I intend in principle to take all rights of reply at the end of plenary sessions and to allow a speaker to end his or her statement before taking any points of order that may arise.

Now I give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Iraq, Mr. Abdul-Karim Hashim Mostafa.

Mr. Hashim Mostafa (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Conference. I would also like to thank you very much for your kind words of welcome and commend your efforts in chairing the Conference under the exceptional circumstances that the world is going through as a result of the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its repercussions in various areas. I am very pleased to be addressing the Conference for the first time today.

The Conference on Disarmament has had many previous successes, including negotiations on the establishment of treaties and conventions that have made and continue to make positive contributions to disarmament. Unfortunately, however, the Conference is currently standing at a critical juncture in an extremely complex time in light of the stalemate in the field of disarmament, which endangers international stability and security. This has resulted in the Conference being diverted from constructive objectives and prevents tangible

progress from being made in the areas of economic and human development and capacity-building to which everyone aspires. Given that the Conference has not been able to exercise the role entrusted to it in negotiating disarmament treaties for more than two decades, we need to redouble efforts to reach an agreement on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that meets the concerns of all member States and is consistent with the rules of procedure of the Conference, to make progress on Conference agenda issues with a view to achieving the disarmament goals to which we all aspire and to invest the momentum and success thus achieved in the international environment. In this context, we would like to commend the efforts of the six presidents of the Conference for this year in presenting and discussing the documents related to the work of the Conference, which we hope will be adopted in order to end the stalemate in the Conference.

Mr. President, Iraq reaffirms its support for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones throughout the world as an important step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. We call upon the international community to implement the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in accordance with the action plan contained in the Final Document of the 2010 Treaty Review Conference, as this resolution is key to establishing such zones. The States that sponsored the resolution on the Middle East, as depositary States of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, must uphold the promises and commitments they made to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and to implement the resolution.

In this context, we express our readiness to participate effectively in the second session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction scheduled for next November. This conference will mark an important step towards achieving the goal of establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East and reinforces other parallel efforts aimed at establishing such a zone.

Mr. President, several important conferences are being held this year, including the review conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Biological Weapons Convention. Iraq looks forward to the success of these conferences through joint action in the spirit of cooperation among member States to achieve positive outcomes that contribute to strengthening international peace and security.

Mr. President, in conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the previous and future presidents of the Conference this year to restore the effectiveness of the Conference on Disarmament so that it plays its true role in addressing disarmament and non-proliferation issues. You can count on the support of Iraq for your projects and we wish you and the other Conference presidents success in your work.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Iraq for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the distinguished delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Aliabadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Rest assured of our full support and cooperation in fulfilling your mandate.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, upholding the role and the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body is of the utmost important. It is regrettable that, despite all the efforts of the two previous Presidents and the utmost flexibility shown by many delegations, including that of Iran, the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to agree on its programme of work due to lack of political will to help it break its long stalemate and fulfil its negotiating mandate in order to resume its substantive work of considering legally binding instruments on the four core issues, particularly nuclear disarmament. Turning the Conference on Disarmament into a deliberative body will not serve the cause of nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, in its new nuclear posture, called the Integrated Review, the United Kingdom has announced that it will increase the number of the nuclear warheads stockpiled.

This new policy does not rule out using nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapons States. I repeat, ironically, the new policy claims that the United Kingdom remains committed to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. I wonder how a build-up of a nuclear arsenal can be interpreted as commitment to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

What can this situation be called other than a travesty? What are the benefits of those so-called gradual disarmament steps, if they can easily be reversed? And what is the value of the step-by-step process if a nuclear State can reverse the course in a material breach of its commitment under the Non-Proliferation Treaty?

Under that Treaty, the non-nuclear-weapon States undertake not to receive or develop nuclear weapons in exchange for the nuclear-weapon States committing themselves to nuclear disarmament, under strict and effective international control.

The new nuclear policy constitutes a material breach of the obligations of the United Kingdom under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, particularly its article VI, and other commitments undertaken by nuclear-weapon States during the past Review Conferences, including the 13 practical steps towards disarmament agreed on at the 2000 Review Conference and the action plan agreed at the 2010 Review Conference.

One cannot disregard the utter hypocrisy of the United Kingdom expressing concern about other States' nuclear programmes and, on the very same day, announcing the new nuclear posture and its intention to increase its stockpile of nuclear weapons.

As our Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Zarif, said, Iran, unlike the United Kingdom, believes that nuclear weapons and all weapons of mass destruction are barbaric and must be eradicated. The United Kingdom lacks the minimum moral ground to preach to others on the danger of weapons of mass destruction, particularly following this controversial decision to further proliferate and build up nuclear weapons.

While the entry into force on 22 January 2021 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons had created good momentum in advance of the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the new United Kingdom policy is very detrimental, not only for the credibility and legitimacy of that treaty, but for its very survival.

Mr. President, Iran has steadfastly expressed strong support for this body and its mandate on the four core issues. It is clear that our position, prioritizing nuclear disarmament, is more relevant than ever. We call on all members to show flexibility so that the Conference may be able to break its long stalemate and start negotiations on a legally binding instrument on nuclear disarmament. Furthermore, having listened to the statement by the representative of the United Kingdom today, we think it is more urgent now than ever before that the Conference on Disarmament should seriously consider the fundamental urgency of negative security assurances.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement and I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Argentina.

Mr. Villegas (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, the Argentine Republic wishes to refer to the announcement made by the representative of the United Kingdom regarding that State's alleged compliance with its supposed obligations, under article 5 of the Ottawa Convention, in respect of the Malvinas Islands, an Argentine territory that the United Kingdom illegitimately considers to be under its jurisdiction or control. The Argentine Republic once again wishes to highlight the particular situation of the Malvinas Islands, as described in the declaration that it made when it ratified the Ottawa Convention in 1999. Since this part of the Argentine territory remains under illegal occupation by the United Kingdom, the Argentine Republic is effectively prevented from having access to the anti-personnel mines placed in the Malvinas in order to fulfil the obligations undertaken in the Ottawa Convention. The Argentine Republic therefore rejects the unilateral British demining activities being conducted in the area subject to the sovereignty dispute, the outcome of which it is unable to verify. Furthermore, the Argentine Republic regrets that the United Kingdom has continued to pursue unilateral demining activities, which run counter to the history of bilateral technical cooperation that has yielded promising results in this area. In fact, in 2001 and 2006, the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom concluded agreements, under the formula on sovereignty, on conducting a study on the feasibility of clearing anti-personnel

mines on the Malvinas Islands. The final report was adopted by both Governments and submitted separately to the Meeting of States parties to the Ottawa Convention in 2007.

Following the presentation of the report in 2009, however, the United Kingdom unilaterally initiated demining activities without the involvement of Argentina. Nevertheless, the Argentine Republic has maintained its commitment to completing the demining of the Malvinas Islands in a bilateral manner, in view of the humanitarian value of such an initiative and the commitments assumed under the Ottawa Convention. Last year, Argentina formally proposed to the United Kingdom a new provisional understanding that would allow the outstanding demining tasks to be conducted jointly within the deadlines established in the Convention. However, the United Kingdom persisted with its unilateral approach by once again rejecting the offer of bilateral technical cooperation made by Argentina.

It did so despite the fact that, in a response issued in 2019, it had expressly stated that it hoped to be able to continue cooperation under the Convention. In October last year, despite the aforementioned refusal by the United Kingdom to undertake joint demining operations in the Malvinas Islands, the Argentine Republic again proposed to the United Kingdom that a strictly technical and humanitarian bilateral agreement be established, under the formula on sovereignty, to enable both countries to definitively complete the demining process.

In this last proposal, the Argentine Republic, as stated in the note of 4 November 2020 sent to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom, expressed its willingness to define a mutually convenient approach that will allow progress to be made on this issue. In this regard, we hope that the United Kingdom will respond positively to the proposal and will once again take up all the commitments that it has assumed within this cooperation framework.

The Argentine Republic reaffirms its rights of sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands, the South Georgia Islands and the South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas, which form an integral part of its national territory. Lastly, we recall that the General Assembly has recognized the existence of a sovereignty dispute between the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom and has urged both Governments to resume negotiations in order to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the dispute as soon as possible. The Special Committee on Decolonization, which adopts a resolution every year, most recently on 5 August 2020, has expressed the same view, stating that the only way to end the dispute is through negotiations between the two parties.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Argentina and I now give the floor to the next speaker, the delegate of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to use this meeting as an opportunity to make some remarks about our future work here at the Conference in Geneva.

To begin, I would like to draw attention to the request made by a number of delegations at the informal meeting of the Conference on 25 March that the Bulgarian presidency continue its efforts to reach a consensus on the two draft decisions relating to organization of the work of our forum in 2021.

We believe that, if we do manage to adopt these two documents immediately after the spring break, we will still have enough time to hold at least three meetings of each of the subsidiary bodies. As has rightly been noted, the break in the session of our Conference could certainly be used to finalize the draft.

As you are aware, on 22 March, the decision was taken to postpone the substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, in which most of the delegations represented at the Conference have traditionally participated. In our view, this situation gives the presidency a good opportunity to continue engaging with delegations on this matter of importance to us all.

The correct approach, in our delegation's view, would be to use the most recent versions of the documents put forward by the Brazilian presidency as the basis for our work. Of course, we cannot tell the current presidency how to manage the Conference, but we hope

that our recommendations, like those of other delegations, will be received with due attention and understanding.

We thank the Bulgarian presidency and all six Presidents of the current session for putting forward their vision for how to hold the thematic meetings during the remaining part of the current session. It is our understanding that the thematic debates will, quite rightly, directly address the items on the agenda, which was adopted by the Conference at the very beginning of the session. This will allow us to bring consistency, predictability and structure to the work of the Conference.

The President: I thank the distinguished delegate of the Russian Federation for his statement and note is taken of his suggestions. They will be given due consideration by the presidency. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): . Mr. President, let me begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation pledges its support to you as you carry out your duties. I would like to thank you and your team, as well as Ambassador Pecsteen de Buytswerve and Ambassador de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão and their teams, for the dedication you have all brought to trying to bring this body to a consensus programme of work. As others have said, the fact that we did not get there is a reflection of the lack of political will of the member States, not that of the six Presidents of this session.

In his statement during the high-level segment, Secretary of State Blinken reminded this body that “our predecessors worked together, despite their differences ... They negotiated landmark treaties that guard against the worst impulses of human nature”. He also pledged that “the United States is here to work, cooperate and once again use the Conference on Disarmament to create bold, innovative agreements to protect ourselves and each other”.

My delegation has done just that. We did not give lip service to flexibility. We made real concessions in the name of adopting a programme of work for the first time in far too long. We are as disappointed as you are, Mr. President, that we are not meeting in subsidiary bodies now rather than speaking in yet another plenary to jointly decree or decry the lack of progress in the Conference on Disarmament.

But I believe that the six Presidents of the current session made the right choice in ending the debate. It is clear that the political will does not exist. If it did, we would have agreed on the language long ago. And I have to say, Mr. President, that, if we cannot agree to a programme of work, how do we expect to ever agree to begin real negotiations?

As I said during an earlier meeting, those States that continue to call for the commencement of negotiations need to ask themselves whether their talking points need to be revisited, given the current stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament.

Now we must move forward, and the United States is here to work and to cooperate. We would like to see thematic debates that are inclusive and constructive. We would like to hear from our colleagues about their national positions and concerns. We hope to hear genuine questions and ideas, as we did at the presentation on the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control on Nuclear Materials on 9 March 2021. Thematic debates are not a substitute for the work we are meant to undertake, but they can advance our mutual understanding if we let them.

I would like, if I may, to make just a few points on the presentation by the United Kingdom on its Integrated Review. The United States welcomes the Integrated Review, its emphasis on the transatlantic alliance and the Indo-Pacific region and the commitment to working together to advance human rights and the rule of law.

The United States is committed, in consultation with our allies and partners, to fostering an environment in which all nations possessing nuclear weapons can reduce the number of weapons and their salience to national defence strategies while maintaining strategic security, ensuring that nuclear weapons are used only for deterrence and creating an environment for nuclear disarmament.

The United Kingdom has long been a leader in reducing nuclear risks and maintaining its nuclear arsenal at the minimum level necessary for deterrence. It is important to remember, as the United States, the United Kingdom and other partners have said, that the current international security environment is a very serious one and that you cannot divorce nuclear disarmament from the prevailing security environment. This is why we have been at the forefront in trying to address this issue by creating both the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiatives. We call on all countries to do their part in improving the security environment, which will help facilitate further nuclear disarmament.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the United States of America for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the distinguished delegate of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, we have requested the floor to ask for clarification on the future work of the Conference on Disarmament, in relation to which you can, as always, count on the full support of the Cuban delegation. You have told us that, on 11 and 18 May, you plan to hold thematic debates on agenda items 1 and 2, which are of vital importance for Cuba. This might not be the best time to raise this issue, but at some point we would like to know the format and modalities of both thematic debates because, in our understanding, an expert or public figure may be invited to address the relevant agenda item during the debate and, if this is the case, the Conference should be informed beforehand so that its consensus may be obtained, unless the person concerned has already registered to address the Conference.

That is my first observation about these thematic debates. I would like to add that it is not clear whether, at some point, the six Presidents of this session are going to circulate a document containing the complete schedule for the year or whether each President will do so in his or her own time, at intervals, which would make it more difficult to see how the activities of the Conference are going to be organized this year. I appreciate that this may be out of your hands, but we would like to know exactly how these matters will be handled.

On the subject of nuclear disarmament, since we are so close to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, I would like to say that the comments made about an increase in the nuclear arsenal, and the use of nuclear weapons, are extremely concerning for the Cuban delegation, since this is a conference on disarmament and not a propaganda forum. We believe that the Non-Proliferation Treaty clearly sets out the obligations of nuclear-weapon States in the area of disarmament and, as far as we are aware, the Treaty does not state that the fulfilment of these obligations depends on any condition being met. States cannot make claims about improving the security environment, or anything else, in order to justify their failure to comply with the obligations established in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of Cuba for his statement. Regarding the questions you raised as regards the format and modalities for our forthcoming debates, of course, we have ideas and we are considering the possibility of inviting presenters on specific topics and subtopics. However, this is a course of action aimed in no way to pre-empt or to narrow the focus of the forthcoming discussions, but rather to go beyond the boundaries of national positions and provide for a more objective and substantive discussion. You will be informed in due course about the specific modalities of conducting the thematic debates when we have finalized the preparations for them.

Regarding the second question you raised about the way that the planning of thematic debates will be presented to the membership of the Conference: it will be done by each presidency at the beginning of its respective tenure and the reason for this is the uncertainty which we still have as to the remaining time of work for this Conference in view of the upcoming Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. So the six Presidents opted for presenting the plans at the beginning of each respective presidency.

I have no further speakers on the list. I will now therefore give the floor to the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic to exercise the right of reply.

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I have asked for the floor to respond to the statement by the Minister of State of the United Kingdom this morning. His use of the word “regime” in talking about the Syrian Government departs from the usual discourse between members of the Conference on Disarmament. The continued use of this term by British officials does not change the fact that the official name of the Government is the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which is a full member of the United Nations and of this Conference. His false allegations about the use of chemical weapons in Syria are baseless and aimed at diverting attention from the fact that the United Kingdom has reneged on its commitment to nuclear disarmament and from its decision to increase its stockpile of nuclear weapons in violation of its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, particularly article VI of the Treaty, under the pretext of deteriorating international nuclear security. The United Kingdom has contributed to this deterioration in international nuclear security through the policy that the Minister of State just explained. The statement by the United Kingdom, which uses the Conference on Disarmament as a platform to promote its political campaigns against Syria over allegations of chemical weapons use, is an example of the politicization of the work of the Conference and of attempts to divert it from its role as a technical negotiating forum and to use it as an arena for settling political scores.

The Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled all its legal obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention since its accession to the Convention in 2013. It has dismantled its chemical weapons programme, disposed of its components and entirely destroyed its production and storage facilities under the auspices of the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, within a record period of time and in extremely complex security conditions. This was confirmed by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Mission, in her report to the Security Council in June 2014 after completion of the mission. It has also been confirmed by the reports of the technical secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which note the cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic with the Organisation and with the technical teams it dispatched, including the Declaration Assessment Team. In letters to the Director-General of the Organisation, my Government has made clear its readiness to follow up on technical meetings and consultations to resolve outstanding issues, as previously agreed. It is also committed to cooperating within the framework of structured dialogue with him, which has led to significant progress on a number of these issues, three of which have recently been resolved.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I would like to point out that the United Kingdom was one of the founding States of the White Helmets terrorist organization in Syria and has provided training and funding to its members and continues to support it even now, although this organization is one of the arms of Jabhat al-Nusrah, which is classified as a terrorist organization on the Security Council list of terrorist entities. The White Helmets are the prime suspects in the incidents involving the use of chemical weapons in Syria, yet they receive financial support from the United Kingdom.

The President: Thank you. The next speaker requesting the floor for the right of reply is the distinguished representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): 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 important office and assure you of my delegation’s full and active support for you as you carry out your duties. In that regard, while we share your regret that it has once again proved not possible for the Conference to reach consensus on a programme of work or on the creation of subsidiary bodies, we fully support the way forward proposed by the six Presidents of the 2021 session as a way of ensuring that we spend the remainder of the time available to us in substantive exchanges on the items on our agenda.

Allow me also to join you in extending our warmest welcome to our new colleague, the distinguished ambassador of Iraq.

Mr. President, I am taking the floor briefly to place on the record the position of the United Kingdom with regard to the statement made earlier by the distinguished Ambassador of Argentina.

The United Kingdom has no doubt about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas of both territories or about the principle of self-determination and the right of the Falkland Islanders to it, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, by virtue of which they may freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

The relationship of the United Kingdom with the Falkland Islands and with all of our overseas territories is a modern one, based on a partnership of shared values and the right of the people of each territory to determine their own future. It was on this basis that the United Kingdom assumed and has discharged its obligations under the Ottawa Convention, bringing the goal of a mine-free world a step closer. This, Mr. President, should be a cause for celebration.

Finally, Mr. President, let me assure the Conference, as the Minister of State said earlier, that the changes to our nuclear posture are entirely consistent with our obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and urge all member States to meet their respective obligations under the conventions negotiated by this body and its predecessors.

The President: I thank the distinguished representative of the United Kingdom for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, with regard to the statement made by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, the Argentine Republic reaffirms that the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas are an integral part of Argentine national territory and, being illegally occupied by the United Kingdom since 1833, are the subject of a sovereignty dispute recognized by the United Nations, which calls the question of the Malvinas Islands a special and particular case of decolonization. The illegal occupation by the United Kingdom has led the General Assembly to adopt 10 resolutions on the issue, beginning with its resolution 2065 (XX). These resolutions recognize the existence of a sovereignty dispute and urge the Governments of the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom to resume negotiations in order to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the dispute as soon as possible.

For its part, the Special Committee on Decolonization has also repeatedly called for negotiations, most recently in the resolution contained in its most recent report.

On 21 October 2020, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States adopted a new declaration on the issue that is couched in similar terms. Argentina reiterates that the principle of self-determination of peoples, on which the United Kingdom bases its refusal to resume negotiations on sovereignty, cannot be applied to the sovereignty dispute between the two countries over the Malvinas Islands, South Georgia Islands and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas. In 1960, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, resolution 1514 (XV), which governs decolonization processes. This resolution affirms the principle of self-determination of peoples and warns that any attempt aimed at the disruption of the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. In other words, General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) established that the self-determination of peoples and the territorial integrity of States are the guiding principles of the decolonization process and that self-determination is not an absolute right since it is restricted by the need to respect the principle of territorial integrity established in resolution 1514. The principle of self-determination of peoples does not apply in this case and the United Nations has never established that the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands are entitled to the right of self-determination. This principle is not invoked in any of the 10 resolutions of the General Assembly or the 38 resolutions of the Special Committee on Decolonization relating to the question of the Malvinas Islands. On the contrary, the question of the Malvinas Islands is considered to be a special and particular case of decolonization in which the existence of a sovereignty dispute between Argentina and the United Kingdom, which must be resolved through bilateral negotiations, is recognized, taking into account the interests, and not the wishes, of the inhabitants of the Islands.

Moreover, on two occasions in 1985, the General Assembly expressly rejected British proposals to incorporate the principle of self-determination into the draft resolution on the question of the Malvinas Islands. There can be no doubt that the reason for this rejection is that the right to self-determination of peoples is not a recognized right of any human community established in a territory but only a right of peoples. The current inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands are not recognized as a people by the resolutions of the United Nations. They constitute a transplanted British population, unlike in classic cases of colonialism where a pre-existing people is subjected to colonial domination.

When the United Kingdom occupied the Islands in 1833, it expelled the Argentine population and authorities who were exercising sovereignty over them. It then proceeded to bring in its own settlers while tightly controlling the migration policy of an isolated territory and refusing to settle the dispute. The invocation by the population of the Islands of an alleged right to self-determination does not apply to this case and has been repeatedly rejected by the United Nations, because the Organization understood that a population transplanted by the colonial Power, like the population of the Malvinas Islands, does not possess the right to self-determination, being indistinguishable from the people of the mainland. Consequently, we are not dealing with a “people” that is stifled, dominated or subjugated by a colonial Power.

The President: I thank the delegate of Argentina for her statement. And now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of the United Kingdom for a second right of reply.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): I do not intend to prolong this much further, but I should just point out that, while you referred to a second right of reply, I do not see anywhere in the rules of procedure any reference to rights of reply. I believe that any delegation has the right to request the floor on any matter pertaining to the work of the Conference.

Be that as it may, Mr. President, as I said, I do not want to prolong this conversation much further. I just wish to express once again my regret that Argentina continues to deny the fundamental human rights of self-determination to the people of the Falkland Islands and point out that the islands have never been legitimately administered by, nor formed part of the sovereign territory of, the Republic of Argentina.

The President: I thank you; your procedural observation is duly taken note of. I now give the floor to the delegate of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): With regard to the alleged referendum mentioned by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, we would like to stress that the vote held in 2013 on the Malvinas Islands was a simple unilateral British act that, unlike other votes in decolonization processes, was not organized or carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. This vote affects neither the sovereignty dispute over the Malvinas Islands nor the legitimate rights of Argentina. As reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in its recent advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965, the General Assembly and the Special Committee on Decolonization have a central role to play, where appropriate, in determining the modalities of free and genuine self-expression of a self-governing territory, including in connection with questions subjected to referendums. Thus, the referendum convened in 2013 is absolutely inadmissible because the principle of self-determination of peoples does not apply to the question of the Malvinas Islands. Moreover, this referendum lacks any validity or legal force as the General Assembly had no involvement whatsoever in its implementation. The solution to the sovereignty dispute does not depend on the outcome of a vote in which British citizens express their wish to remain British. Allowing the British citizens of the Islands to be the arbiters of a dispute to which their own country is a party distorts the right to self-determination of peoples since a people, within the meaning of international law, cannot be said to exist in the Malvinas Islands. Furthermore, the British authorities cannot be permitted to use the exercise of an alleged right to self-determination in an attempt to legitimize a situation that is illegal in practice or to validate the violation of the territorial integrity of Argentina, which violation is incompatible, under General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Argentina reaffirms that the interests of the inhabitants of the Malvinas Islands and their way of life are adequately protected by the Constitution of Argentina and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

The President: Thank you. I would like to appeal to all delegations to show a degree of restraint in exercising their right to take the floor in order to maintain the constructive spirit of this Conference. Thank you very much for your understanding.

With that, we conclude our work for this morning. The next plenary meeting will take place during the second part of the Conference's 2021 session.

This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.