

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and sixth-eighth plenary meeting

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President: Mr. Yuri Borissov Sterk (Bulgaria)



The President: I call to order the 1568th 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, Her Excellency Ms. Kirsti Kauppi, Ambassador Extraordinary Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, who has just assumed her responsibilities as representative of her Government to the Conference. On behalf of my Government and on behalf of the Conference, I would like to take this opportunity to assure you of our full cooperation and support in your new assignments.

Distinguished colleagues, I would like first of all to share some remarks regarding our discussion today. On 19 December 2019, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 74/50, in operative paragraph 3 of which it encouraged the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission to address nuclear disarmament verification, including through substantive consideration of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/67 of 14 December 2016.

Additionally, in operative paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 74/50, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a group of governmental experts consisting of up to 25 participants chosen on the basis of equitable geographical representation and equitable representation of women and men, which would meet in Geneva for four sessions of one week each in 2021 and 2022 to further consider nuclear disarmament verification issues, including, inter alia, the concept of a group of scientific and technical experts, building on the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification and the views of Member States referred to in paragraph 2 of the resolution.

In view of this reminder of the tasks with which the General Assembly recently mandated the Conference on Disarmament, I believe that we have every reason to discuss the role of verification in the framework of the Conference and, more specifically, to seek a common understanding on the next possible practical steps regarding nuclear disarmament verification.

We will now start our discussion on nuclear disarmament verification under agenda item 1 of the standing agenda of the Conference, with a presentation from Mr. Jørn Osmundsen, Special Envoy for Disarmament Affairs of Norway and Chair-designate of the Group of Governmental Experts established under operative paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 74/50. He will be followed by Mr. Pavel Podvig, senior researcher on weapons of mass destruction and other strategic weapons at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research.

Mr. Osmundsen (Norway): Mr. President, as you mentioned in your introduction, in operative paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 74/50 on nuclear disarmament verification, the Conference on Disarmament is encouraged to address nuclear disarmament verification, including through substantive consideration of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. I am therefore very pleased that this meeting of the Conference is dedicated to nuclear disarmament verification. In my presentation, I will first consider the work of the first Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification and then outline the schedule of work for the next Group of Governmental Experts.

In 2016, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/67 on nuclear disarmament verification, in which it requested the Secretary-General to establish a group of governmental experts with a mandate to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. More precisely, the group was instructed to consider the general role of nuclear disarmament verification in achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons.

The resolution also called, inter alia, on the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on nuclear disarmament verification. The Group of Governmental Experts took those views as its point of departure. In its work, it dedicated considerable time to principles, taking guidance from the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament of 1978 and the 16 general principles of verification identified by the United Nations Disarmament Commission in 1988. The Group

also benefited from several presentations on relevant past experiences and from other verification regimes.

The Group focused on three dimensions related to nuclear disarmament verification: first, what could constitute effective and adequate nuclear disarmament verification, which included discussions on the conceptual understanding and the principles of nuclear disarmament verification; second, how to go about nuclear disarmament verification and the extent to which it is possible to draw lessons from past experiences; and, third, who should carry out nuclear disarmament verification, which encompassed consideration of possible roles and functions in carrying out and supporting nuclear disarmament verification during its different phases.

To support the work of the Group, 17 working papers, including a number of joint papers, were submitted by experts on the three dimensions. The report of the Group was adopted by consensus. The Chair, Ambassador Langeland, highlighted the constructive and collegial attitude and working atmosphere among all the members as crucial for reaching consensus.

The Group's report is organized in three main sections. The first part reflects the range of views expressed in the Group; the second part looks at possible points of convergence, including suggested guiding principles; and the third part outlines the conclusions and recommendations agreed by the Group.

I would like to briefly describe the set of principles identified by the Group.

The first principle is that nuclear disarmament verification should conform with international law and the principles laid out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and in the United Nations Disarmament Commission principles of verification.

Second, nuclear disarmament verification measures should be decided by the parties to specific treaties, and all the parties to such treaties should have equal rights to establish and take part in verification activities.

Third, nuclear disarmament verification must conform to applicable international legal non-proliferation obligations, national safety and security requirements and the need to protect otherwise sensitive information.

Fourth, nuclear disarmament verification must be effective in ensuring compliance by the parties with obligations under the relevant treaty, while also being mindful of the need for efficiency in the application of financial, human and other resources.

Fifth, nuclear disarmament verification provisions in the context of a specific treaty should be clear as to the obligations of the parties concerned.

The sixth principle is that a future nuclear disarmament verification regime must be non-discriminatory to the parties to the treaty.

And finally, the seventh principle is that verification arrangements satisfactory to all parties involved should correspond to the purposes, scope and nature of the agreements reached under nuclear disarmament.

In the final part of the report, the Group reached seven conclusions.

Firstly, advancing nuclear disarmament is an ongoing undertaking, and there is need for continued international examination of the issue in all its aspects, including verification.

The second conclusion is that verification is essential in the process of nuclear disarmament and to achieving a world without nuclear weapons.

Thirdly, the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament will be determined on a case-by-case basis in the context of the negotiation of legally binding agreements in the area of nuclear disarmament.

Fourthly, a credible verification regime, in which all States have confidence, will be essential for maintaining a world without nuclear weapons.

Fifthly, confidence-building measures may complement nuclear disarmament verification arrangements between the implementing parties to a specific treaty.

Sixthly, engagement in nuclear disarmament verification must be strictly in line with applicable international legal non-proliferation obligations as well as other legal requirements.

And finally, the seventh conclusion is that all States could contribute to aspects of nuclear disarmament verification and no State is restricted from developing verification techniques and methodologies.

The Group's final recommendation was that the Member States of the United Nations, as well as the relevant parts of the international disarmament machinery, in accordance with their respective mandates, should consider the report. It also recommended that further work related to the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament should be considered, taking the report into account.

The General Assembly then adopted resolution 74/50, which welcomes the adoption by consensus of the Group's report. The resolution also provided for follow-on activities within the framework of the United Nations. In particular, the Secretary-General was asked to seek the views of Member States on the report of the Group of Governmental Experts. These views were collected and published by the Secretary-General last year as document A/75/126.

In the resolution, the General Assembly also encourages the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission to address nuclear disarmament verification. It requests the Secretary-General to establish a new group of governmental experts on nuclear disarmament verification, building on the former Group of Governmental Experts. And it instructs the incoming chair of that group to organize, in New York, two informal intersessional consultative meetings, with all United Nations Member States and to convey the views of the Member States to the Group of Governmental Experts.

Mr. President, the new Group of Governmental Experts was appointed last fall by the Secretary-General. The Group consists of 25 participants, chosen on the basis of equitable geographical representation and equitable representation of women and men. The Group will meet in Geneva for four sessions of one week each in 2021 and 2022. Through a silent procedure, I was nominated as Chair-designate in January this year, and I thank all the participants of the Group for their confidence in me.

The mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts is given under resolution 74/50, in paragraph 6 of which the Group is requested to "further consider nuclear disarmament verification issues, including, inter alia, the concept of a Group of Scientific and Technical Experts, building on the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification and the views of Member States". It should be noted that, in paragraph 4 of the resolution, the General Assembly "welcomes efforts for capacity-building on nuclear disarmament verification".

The pandemic situation has affected the work of us all, including the Group of Governmental Experts. The original plan was to conduct the first formal session in April. As we aim for in-person meetings, the Group has consented to conduct the first formal session in November this year, with the three following sessions in 2022. We cannot at this point know for sure whether everyone will be able to participate in person in November, so we are also planning for different scenarios, including hybrid versions.

At the first session, the Group will formally elect its Chair and decide on a work programme. In cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, we conducted two informal and voluntary briefings for the Group of Governmental Experts members in April, outlining some general considerations on nuclear disarmament verification issues and providing updates on previous and ongoing activities. We are now considering setting up more such informal briefings for the Group.

Mr. President, thank you for organizing this session. I look forward to hearing the views here in the Conference on Disarmament on nuclear disarmament verification, including on the report of the first Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament

Verification. I will collect those views and bring them to the attention of the Group of Governmental Experts at its first focal session.

The President: I thank Mr. Osmundsen for his presentation and hope that he will get useful feedback from this Conference in the course of today's meeting. I would like now to give the floor to Mr. Pavel Podvig, Senior Researcher at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, to make his presentation.

Mr. Podvig (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research): Mr. President, I will try to share with you some ideas about verification that I hope you will find useful and interesting. It is of course a very broad field and there is no way I could do justice to every issue, but nevertheless I will try to give you some idea of how the field lies today.

Let me start with the definition of verification, as developed by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a group that has done a lot of work on the subject. It is defined as a set of national and cooperative activities, tools, procedures, analytical processes and judgments about what is happening with regard to specific activities defined in an agreement. That is a very full definition but every part is important: it starts with the activities, tools and procedures and ends with judgments. And it specifically refers to obligations in a certain agreement: this is something that the first Group of Governmental Experts included in its report.

The specific verification arrangements depend on the specific agreement on the treaty. On the other hand, it is understood that our ability to conclude certain treaties or agreements would also depend on what kind of tools and procedures we can develop. The international community has a lot of good experience with verification and various obligations, for example, in the case of United States/Soviet and Russian bilateral arms control towards the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but also the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and others. There is thus a very rich foundation on which to build this work on nuclear disarmament verification.

All aspects of verification are important. First of all, the tools and methods are not just technical tools, not just equipment and measurement procedures or things like satellite imagery. The term also covers organizational arrangements, the institutional structures of the treaties and the verification bodies. We can design the processes in a way to take advantage of certain tools that are available or to avoid certain issues. I will go into more detail on that later.

Judgments are a very important part of the process. Normally, each State reaches its own judgment about what is happening in respect of obligations. It can be a tricky issue with regard to nuclear disarmament verification because there are non-proliferation obligations and various considerations of security and safety that could complicate the verification arrangements and the judgments that are made. As you can imagine, there is a certain asymmetry, not just between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, but also among nuclear-weapon States themselves. For example, one State could reach a certain judgment, but might not be able to explain how it has done so because of all the various considerations.

And ultimately the judgment that must be reached is about compliance. And what is compliance in this case? How do we judge a violation? This is a particularly thorny issue because we are talking about nuclear disarmament verification, which concerns nuclear-weapon States and they would be starting from the current fairly high level of nuclear arms, nuclear materials and expertise.

Another question is whether we have today what it takes to support nuclear disarmament verification. I would say that the answer is both yes and no. Of course, we all know that verification of the disarmament process is not a trivial task; it involves dealing with nuclear weapons and sensitive information, which has not been done before. Progress has been made in the past in reducing arsenals, for instance, in the United States and the Soviet Union – now Russia – as well as in other States like France and the United Kingdom. But none of the treaties concerned actually dealt with nuclear weapons. So there is great interest and there has been great investment in the development of technical tools that would make it possible to deal with nuclear weapons. Groups such as the International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification have been working on that. At the same time, even

though the technical tools are important, it would, in my view, be wrong to focus on them exclusively and assume that technical solutions are the necessary – or the only – part of nuclear disarmament. These are very important and complex issues, and people have spent decades working on things like information barriers. In my view, it is also possible to build the verification process or the disarmament process in a way that would not require dealing with weapons, and this is something that the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research has been working on. I believe that it would be possible to design the disarmament process in a way that would not involve actually looking at nuclear weapons or having to know how many weapons were there. It could be organized so that everything was done by the owner and it would still be perfectly verifiable.

It is, nevertheless, important to explore all possibilities, because verification does not exist in a vacuum; we never know what kind of agreement might be possible in the future or what kind of agreement would be politically viable. I might believe it would be possible to do things in a certain way, but the politics of nuclear disarmament could tell me otherwise and certain solutions would simply not be politically acceptable.

On the other hand, I want to emphasize that we should not get locked into technical solutions. One of my favourite examples in this regard is the issue of tagging missiles in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. At some point, the United States and Russia realized that, to make the verification arrangements robust, they needed to tag missiles and things like strategic bombers. They spent a lot of time trying to work out how to do that and there was some very sophisticated technology available, with tags that could not be broken and could not be falsified. But in the end, they just decided that, as each missile has a serial number given to it at the assembly factory, they would just use that serial number. And for strategic bombers, the identification numbers are just the big numbers that are painted on the fuselage. So you see that you can think about technology but it might, in the end, be entirely possible to come to an agreement that is much simpler.

To a certain extent, this is the case with what is known as sensitive – or proliferation-sensitive or national-security-sensitive – information. I think that the question here is how to decide what is sensitive and who takes that decision. As many of you would probably agree, this whole concept is, to a large extent, a construct and there is also a point of view that there are no secrets in nuclear weapons, as long as you can control fissile materials – that view is supported by a number of weapon designers. The experience of the United States and Russia also shows us that things that were sensitive at one point may later not be sensitive at all. Take, for instance, the very detailed data that the United States and Russia exchange on a more or less daily basis regarding their nuclear forces: for example, every time a mobile missile leaves its base, Russia sends a notification to the United States. The Treaty allows the parties to use radiation detection equipment to verify the non-nuclear nature of objects and there are on-site inspections. The procedures concerned can be very intrusive and very complicated and would have been unthinkable 30 years ago. At some point, the system was thought to be impossible because it concerned very sensitive information, but now we see that it is actually standard, and both Russia and the United States believe that it has to be done because it is the foundation of their stability in nuclear affairs. But, while we may have different ideas about the sensitivity of various types of information, it is also clear that there is a process involved; such change cannot be achieved in a single bound.

Turning to emerging and sophisticated technologies, we could talk about various things such as satellite imagery, open source imagery and big data. I think it is fair to say that these could be very important tools in verification and, especially if combined with a degree of cooperation, could become particularly effective, as we have seen in the past with much less capable national technical means. But let me emphasize that, in my view, the key to building a robust verification regime is interaction between people. It is through the inspections, notifications, development of procedures and resolution of disputes that we can have confidence in verification conclusions. In that sense, a shift towards remote monitoring and similar kinds of processing could actually be counterproductive, because they remove that human component from the process. I would argue that the technical tools and methods are important, but they should be deployed in a way that increases trust, human interaction and the intensity of these human interactions.

Finally, I will say a few words about the effectiveness of verification. This is a difficult issue because the standard definition of effective verification is that the verification system should allow you to detect significant violations in time to permit a response that denies the violator the benefits of the violation. But that is a deeply adversarial approach because that definition is inherited from the days of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. And what is ironic is that it did not really work even in those times. The verification system worked fully when the two parties created conditions in which they saw no reason to violate their obligations. Those conditions included deployment of appropriate technical tools but also enhanced trust and confidence. Once those conditions are created, then verification provides confirmation that they exist, and that is important. It is no longer an adversarial, but rather a cooperative, process; and only as a cooperative process can it be successful.

Let me conclude by saying that nuclear disarmament, at least in the way that we think about it in this context, would only be possible as a cooperative process, and that means by using the verification system that is being built. And this is the task of the Group of Governmental Experts or the Group of Scientific and Technical Experts, if the latter is convened. The important part is to design the verification system in a way that makes the process more cooperative and increases confidence and trust. And that may require the development of new technical tools, new procedures and the setting up of a new organization, which, in my view, should be the focus of attention and should be kept in mind throughout this work.

The President: I thank Mr. Podvig for his presentation and also thank both of our panellists today for reminding us of the importance and relevance of effective and credible verification procedures and mechanisms for any present and future institutional and legal architecture in the field of arms control and arms reduction, but also as a means of improving the degree of mutual trust among the major stakeholders in this area.

I would like now to invite delegations to share their views on the topic under discussion. The first speaker on my list is Ambassador Kirsti Kauppi, Permanent Representative of Finland.

Ms. Kauppi (Finland): Mr. President, thank you very much for your kind welcoming words to me and allow me to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation during your presidency.

With your permission, I would like to offer some general observations on disarmament from the perspective of my country, in addition to commenting on today's very interesting and important theme. But first, I have a personal observation, in the form of a flashback from over 35 years ago. At that time, I served in Geneva as a Junior Professional Officer in one of the United Nations organizations. I remember vividly the first summit meeting between President Reagan and the then new Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev in November 1985 in this city. The cold war was raging, and the nuclear weapons stockpiles had reached a new high of 62,000. The absurdity of the nuclear weapons arms race was clear for everyone. But it continued, and the world lived under the real and existential threat of a nuclear conflict between the two superpowers.

By the way, at that meeting, Reagan and Gorbachev also agreed on scientific exchanges on environmental issues. It may have been the first mention of environment in a superpower summit. I remember pausing and wondering what that dialogue would bring.

Today, 35 years later, we still struggle with these two existential threats. And the urgency has increased. On environment, it is acknowledged. But on disarmament, after earlier progress and despite some good news, such as the extension of the New START, momentum seems to be lacking. This cannot continue.

Mr. President, it is more than one year since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The devastating impact of the pandemic should underline the need for deeper international collaboration, as the virus – like other major threats – does not acknowledge borders. The pandemic has required us to adopt innovative and creative ways to operate and cooperate in the multilateral context. These opportunities unfortunately remain to be fully utilized in the disarmament sector.

Turning to today's very important and interesting theme of nuclear disarmament verification, first of all, we congratulate Mr. Jørn Osmundsen, Special Envoy for Disarmament Affairs of Norway on his nomination as Chair-designate of the Group of Governmental Experts. Finland welcomes the important work done by the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament in 2018–2019, and we support the ongoing work of the Group of Governmental Experts on the same topic.

I also want to thank the Chair-designate and the representative of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research for their very important and interesting interventions, including the observation that verification has, in addition to its technical dimension, the very important human dimension, which is part of confidence-building.

Verification is essential to the process of nuclear disarmament and to achieving a world without nuclear weapons. In our view, this also requires appropriate and active contributions and participation by non-nuclear-weapons States. Verification is aimed at safeguarding compliance with obligations and is thus an important tool in strengthening international security. I would also like to underline the groundbreaking work of the International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification.

I will now say a word on the priorities of my delegation for this year at the Conference on Disarmament and in the disarmament sector at large. Our objective at the Conference on Disarmament is clear. Finland is fully committed to the total elimination of nuclear weapons, achieved through a balanced, mutual, irreversible and verifiable elimination of these weapons.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The next Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty is crucial for the advancement of nuclear disarmament. It is essential for the success of the Review Conference that the nuclear-weapons States renew their commitment to nuclear disarmament in line with the article VI of the Treaty.

Finland has contributed to the preparation of the Review Conference in all its aspects. In our view, there are real opportunities to make headway in nuclear risk reduction. As a member of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament and the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative, we are identifying, developing and proposing practical and effective nuclear risk reduction measures.

Finland also believes that confidence-building and transparency remain key issues, of which verification is a part. In this respect, we hope that there will be an agreement among the five nuclear-weapon States to improve transparency on nuclear policies and doctrines. We are looking forward to an enhanced dialogue between the nuclear-weapon and the non-nuclear-weapon States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Finland promotes the global regulation of autonomous weapons systems. International regulation must keep abreast of technological development. We need mutually agreed rules to which the States developing these technologies must also be committed.

We also want to take part in the discussions on new threats, risk reduction and behaviour in outer space. Finland welcomes the joint efforts to increase our common understanding on how to address the growing threats and risks to space security and systems, and how to mitigate them. There is a growing demand for stronger norms, information exchange, transparency and confidence-building measures in the space domain. Further understanding of the threats is very much needed. The new initiative pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/36 on reducing space threats through responsible behaviour offers important encouragement to all States – spacefaring or not – to address this issue. Today's reality is that what happens in space affects us all. We look forward to hearing the Secretary-General's views and recommendations on further steps to reduce threats in space through responsible behaviour.

Mr. President, the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament was a timely, relevant and important call to action and Finland has been a strong supporter of it since the beginning. We have welcomed the Secretary-General's idea and initiative to put disarmament and arms control at the centre of the work of the United Nations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, one of the key regimes developed in Geneva. The prevention of cross-border health security threats, be they natural or created by humans, requires efficient international cooperation for improved preparedness and resilience. Furthermore, by supporting other countries in their response to epidemics, pandemics and biological threats, we also effectively bolster our own safety and security. Finland actively participates in the efforts to strengthen the capabilities required to prevent, detect and respond to biological threats globally.

Mr. President, disarmament enhances not only global security but also human security. In our international humanitarian demining action, Finland concentrates on fragile States. For the period 2021–2025, Finland will allocate €15 million for humanitarian mine action projects. This action is in line with our objective to act as a strong advocate of the rights of persons with disabilities in all sectors.

Finland also stresses the importance of including the gender perspective throughout all stages of mine action activities. And that is also true for the disarmament sector at large: participation and representation of women in all aspects of the work is important.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Finland and I give the floor to Mr. Lim Sang-beom, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, at the beginning of the second part of the Conference on Disarmament session this year, I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I also wish to extend my delegation's warm welcome to the Ambassador of Finland and other colleagues who have newly joined the Conference.

Mr. President, although we have again failed to adopt a workplan this year, my delegation appreciates your leadership in commencing the thematic debates. This will allow us to make very good use of our resources and time. In general, my delegation welcomes the proposed schedule of the thematic debates on agenda items 1 and 2 for the remaining two weeks of your presidency. I hope that thematic discussions on other imperative issues will continue in the coming weeks and months, with close coordination among the six Presidents of the current session of the Conference.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Mr. Jørn Osmundsen, Special Envoy for Disarmament Affairs of Norway and Chair-designate of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification, as well as to Mr. Pavel Podvig, Senior Researcher in the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, for their informative and insightful presentations today.

Mr. President, as a strong supporter of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime and a State in full compliance with the Treaty, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its commitment to achieving the shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons. My delegation also believes that the commitments made by the five nuclear-weapon States under article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty should be combined with their active engagement with non-nuclear-weapon States in various trust and confidence-building exercises.

In this vein, the Republic of Korea is actively participating in the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative as co-chair of one of its subgroups. Korea is of the view that priority and particular consideration should be given to the following elements of defence in nuclear disarmament.

First, we strongly believe that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, which has been the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, should remain the solid foundation for our efforts to move closer towards global zero.

Second, efforts should be prioritized and further strengthened to bridge the gap and deepen common understanding and trust among States, especially between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States.

Third, many long-standing issues, including the early commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, should not be overlooked.

Mr. President, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, the Conference on Disarmament has been mandated to play an important role in the advancement of nuclear disarmament. This is clearly presented by our first agenda item, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. It has remained unchanged for more than two decades. While the reality of the Conference on Disarmament today is disappointing to many of us, it is never too late to commence substantive discussions towards future negotiations. In particular, recalling that the General Assembly has encouraged the Conference on Disarmament to address nuclear disarmament verification, we very much appreciate the presentation made by the Chair-designate of the Group of Governmental Experts on verification in this chamber today.

My delegation recognizes that, while verification is not an aim in itself, it is essential to the process of nuclear disarmament and to achieving a world without nuclear weapons through the common efforts to build up nuclear disarmament verification capacities, including the International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. The Stockholm Initiative, in which the Republic of Korea is participating, also suggests support for the ongoing initiative of developing multilateral nuclear disarmament verification capacities as one of the stepping stones to the implementation of nuclear disarmament. We also believe that the Group of Governmental Experts process, along with other international efforts, contributes to the understanding of important issues related to nuclear disarmament verification and to bridging the gap of trust and confidence among States, especially between nuclear States and non-nuclear-weapon States.

My delegation hopes that the outcome document of the upcoming tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will duly capture the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament, reflecting the enhanced international attention to the issues in recent years.

The President: I thank Ambassador Lim for his statement and give the floor to the next speaker on my list, Ambassador Wood of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Mr. President, let me first congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation and I pledge our full support to you as you carry out your duties. I would also like to thank you for convening our first thematic debate of the Conference on Disarmament session and to thank the panellists for their very informative presentations.

As Secretary Blinken said when he addressed this body on 22 February, our predecessors managed to work together, despite their differences, to try to make the world a safer place. Nowhere is that more – and less – true than in the critical area of disarmament verification, and that is what I intend to focus on today.

On one hand, we have our cornerstone, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and bilateral treaties like New START, both of which have robust verification obligations and long records of strong compliance. On the other hand, we see the danger posed to us all when a State stops complying with its verification obligations. By and large, States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty take their treaty obligations seriously and work closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency to verify their compliance.

The United States certainly falls into that category, and we are proud to maintain our record of compliance with the Treaty. We call on those States that are not in compliance with their verification-related obligations under the Treaty to take the necessary steps to comply with those obligations.

Turning to New START, the United States and Russia have adhered to our obligations, despite all our many other differences. We hold each other accountable through the Treaty's verification regime. Extending New START undoubtedly makes the world safer, it ensures that we have verifiable limits on Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers until 5 February 2026. These numerical limits prevent Russia from increasing the number of nuclear weapons mounted atop missiles that can reach the United States in roughly an hour or less.

The New START verification regime enables us to monitor Russian compliance with the Treaty and provides us with greater insight into that country's nuclear posture, including

through on-site inspections that allow United States inspectors to have eyes on Russian nuclear forces. And the Treaty's verification regime provides the Russians with analogous monitoring capabilities, promoting mutual confidence and stability.

The United States will use the time provided by the five-year extension of the New START to pursue with Russia, in consultation with our Congress, allies and partners, arms control that addresses all Russian nuclear weapons, including novel strategic systems and non-strategic nuclear weapons. President Biden and President Putin have agreed to explore strategic stability discussions on a range of arms control and emerging security issues. We are in the process of preparing for these discussions.

Since 2014, through a public-private partnership with the Nuclear Threat Initiative, the United States has led the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. The Partnership brings together more than 25 States, with and without nuclear weapons, under a cooperative framework aimed at further understanding of the complex challenges involved in the verification of nuclear disarmament. In the six years since the Partnership began, more than 100 experts have engaged in collaborative work to develop potential solutions to these challenges. This work is detailed in more than 50 reports and papers outlining procedural and technical mechanisms to address some of the most complex verification challenges, such as the dismantling of nuclear warheads. The Partnership is a prime example of United States-supported effective measures that help to create the environment for future nuclear disarmament and demonstrate our commitment to article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr. President, let me close by reminding us all that verification is a well-tested tool for building trust. The cooperation between technicians and scientists who carry out verification is often the building block on which further cooperation is built. We must encourage those who have potential verification methods to continue, and expand, their work, including working cooperatively with others. Effective verification is a critical component of any arms control or disarmament treaty. Verification measures must be robust. They must be feasible. That is how we build lasting agreements that can improve our security.

I ask that we all keep these truths in mind as we look forward to the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and continue work in this body and beyond to further strengthen verification by commencing the long-overdue negotiation of a verifiable fissile material cut-off treaty.

The President: I thank Ambassador Wood for his statement and I now give the floor to Ambassador Aitzhanova of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Aitzhanova (Kazakhstan): Mr. President, we thank you for convening the thematic debates on the agenda items of the Conference. The topic of nuclear disarmament verification discussed today is highly relevant and timely. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for collective action in a number of important areas of global governance, one of which is nuclear disarmament. Therefore, a robust and credible verification mechanism is an essential element for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

Two important events – the extension of the New START between the Russian Federation and the United States and the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – have taken place recently. Kazakhstan welcomes the extension of the New START, as a demonstration of responsible behaviour and commitment to the process of nuclear disarmament in accordance with article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, to which Kazakhstan is a party, is a clear indication that nuclear disarmament remains a permanent and urgent priority. These two international instruments have direct relevance to the topic of nuclear disarmament verification.

Over the last 30 years, the Russian Federation and the United States have accumulated vast experience in verification under the New START and its predecessors. These measures include data exchanges, as well as on-site inspections. The interaction between the two countries creates a solid technical and practical foundation for any future verification efforts.

Let me note that Kazakhstan has been a party to these disarmament processes as a State which inherited a significant nuclear arsenal on its territory and successfully met its international obligations by removing nuclear weapons and destroying military infrastructure in a transparent and verifiable manner. Voluntary measures undertaken by nuclear-weapon States make an important contribution to building trust.

We are grateful to the French delegation for arranging a visit by Geneva-based diplomats in February 2020 to the former nuclear facilities in Pierrelatte and Marcoule. The visit was a demonstration of the country's openness in respect of elements of its nuclear programme. Participants were able to find out about measures aimed at the irreversible cut-off of fissile material production, the prevention of such material falling into the wrong hands and protection of the environment.

Following the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the States parties started discussing ways to implement provisions related to nuclear disarmament verification under article IV of the Treaty. This article stipulates the creation of an international authority or authorities to verify the irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons programmes. While that discussion is at an early stage, it can make an important contribution to the ongoing debate on verification. At the same time, we are of the view that the Treaty does not substitute, but complements, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which remains a cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

In our opinion, the technical capabilities and expertise of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organization could be part of any future verification mechanism. Needless to say, the adoption and implementation of a fissile material cut-off treaty is one of the four core issues of the Conference and remains a prerequisite for effective nuclear disarmament verification.

Kazakhstan supports and participates in the work of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. We believe that the Group is an essential platform for seeking points of convergence among nuclear and non-nuclear States, developing trust and confidence, discussing challenges and risks related to verification and identifying next steps.

Distinguished colleagues, in his address to the General Assembly last year, President Tokayev underlined that determination to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world has become an integral part of our country's national identity. We have a moral right to spearhead global actions to eliminate nuclear weapons. With this in mind, we are ready to support, promote and facilitate efforts towards nuclear disarmament verification.

The upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is to be convened during an unprecedented period of global uncertainty. We should not only reaffirm the decision of previous conferences, but also identify specific tasks for the next cycle.

The President: I thank Ambassador Aitzhanova for her statement. The next speaker on my list is the Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Félix Baumann.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I also wanted to take this opportunity to welcome our colleague from Finland, Ambassador Kauppi, to the disarmament community and express to her my best wishes. And I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for the efforts you have made during the first part of our session towards the adoption of a decision to establish subsidiary bodies on all the items on the Conference on Disarmament agenda. We remain convinced that that is the most realistic approach at this stage to allow our Conference to move forward and we regret that it has not been possible to reach a consensus to implement it. We should now make the best possible use of the remainder of the 2021 session of the Conference to examine the agenda items, which we are happy to be addressing systematically, one after the other.

Mr. President, today you invited us to focus on item 1 of the agenda, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. We thank you for having sought to inform our debate through a series of thematic presentations with a view to focused discussion, including on the issue of nuclear disarmament verification. I will now endeavour to address both nuclear disarmament as a whole and nuclear disarmament verification, specifying how those

two topics relate to each other. Firstly, I wish to underscore that Switzerland regrets the slow progress made in nuclear disarmament and is concerned about recent discussions on nuclear capabilities and doctrines which seem to be going in the opposite direction.

The current situation is precarious and the road towards new negotiations on arms control is uncertain. It appears that the margin of manoeuvre we have for making progress on nuclear disarmament by developing new treaties based on traditional approaches has shrunk. The traditional approaches of scaling back either delivery systems, as with the New START, or certain categories of nuclear weapons, as with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, may no longer be adequate to meet the challenges posed by new strategic realities.

In this context, we encourage the nuclear-weapon States and others that possess nuclear weapons to step up their consideration of a new generation of arms control agreements. On the one hand, these future agreements should include a much broader group of systems, meaning different types of delivery systems or different types of warheads, or even include the offensive and defensive systems associated with deterrence. On the other hand, these future agreements could very well go beyond the bilateral framework and take a plurilateral or multilateral form in order to cover the full complexity of the nuclear landscape.

Secondly, to come to the question of verification, I would like to highlight that this is not an end in itself but must be understood within a broader context as an integral part of nuclear disarmament. It is key to enabling gradual and credible reductions and eventually to bringing about a world without nuclear weapons and keeping it that way. The legal basis for this objective is set forth in article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, whose full implementation would have the effect of establishing a world without nuclear weapons and “under strict and effective international control”. We may suppose that such a system of strict international control would have to be incorporated into one or more international treaties with, at its centre, a verification system guaranteeing that nuclear arsenals have been fully dismantled and building confidence that no party to such an instrument could cheat without being detected.

Significant efforts have been made in recent years to develop the necessary instruments, procedures and verification institutions, in various forms, involving both nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. Switzerland fully supports the approach of jointly meeting the challenges of nuclear disarmament verification and developing specific technologies and procedures.

Like many other Conference member and observer States, Switzerland is an active member of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. It firmly believes that the outcomes of the Partnership have already increased confidence in the possibility of conducting multilateral verification while managing safety, security and non-proliferation in a satisfactory manner.

Switzerland also supports continuation of the work of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament, led by Norway, and I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Osmundsen for his presentation this morning. Switzerland stresses that it is important for the Conference to familiarize itself with the work of the Group where this is relevant; as an example, I would mention the proposal from Brazil that the Conference should set up a group of scientific and technical experts on verification with the aim of establishing a productive relationship between political work and technical work. I would also like to thank the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and Mr. Podvig for the presentation he just delivered.

I would like to conclude by stressing that all these efforts in the area of nuclear disarmament verification in no way guarantee that a world free of nuclear weapons under strict international control can be made a reality. However, the efforts to that end make such a world much more likely, as they are capable of providing the essential instruments to overcome some of the challenges of verification.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Baumann and now give the floor to the next speaker on the list, Ambassador Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies of Spain.

Mr. Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, as this is the first time that I have taken the floor during your presidency, allow me to extend to you my sincerest congratulations and to assure you of my delegation's full cooperation in ensuring that the work over which you are presiding is conducted successfully. The issue before us today is the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. My country's ultimate goal is to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, which requires the international community to make realistic and practical commitments. Spain firmly believes that we must make tangible and substantial progress in nuclear disarmament through the effective implementation of article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Today we are finally focusing on the verification of nuclear disarmament, and I am glad, because we have worked hard to develop and present my country's positions in this area. We believe that verification is essential to achieving total, universal and irreversible nuclear disarmament. Systematic and effective verification of the requirements, processes and mechanisms for nuclear disarmament is a prerequisite for achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Simply put: there can be no effective disarmament without verification.

Mr. President, verification protocols allow us to monitor, control and evaluate the progress being made towards disarmament. These protocols are not only technical in nature. They must address the scope and governance of disarmament and the means and even the financing necessary to bring it about. Disarmament is not a credible prospect without a verification protocol. Effective verification requires the creation of an independent and competent authority to monitor, control and certify that the stated measures have actually been taken. This authority may comprise parties to the same treaty, as the two speakers who have presented their ideas and work to us today have pointed out. The work before us today presents a good opportunity to lay down and fine-tune the definition of this independent international institution. We have good examples to explore and learn from, ranging from bilateral nuclear arms control agreements, as my colleague, the Ambassador of the United States of America, has described, to the international nuclear safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the monitoring, control and verification system of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. There is, therefore, experience on which to base our work.

Mr. President, my Government requests and encourages the entire international community, and particularly the nuclear-weapon States, to support international and multilateral initiatives to encourage, promote and develop capacities to verify nuclear disarmament, such as the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, and the work that the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification presented to the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, which has been explained to us today. This is why we must work to build a comprehensive and effective verification mechanism that covers the entire nuclear weapons cycle and that is, above all, capable of certifying the irreversible nature of processes for dismantling capacities and technologies for nuclear weapons development.

We promote international and multilateral initiatives through the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, which includes 16 countries and seeks the universal and irreversible disarmament of nuclear weapons through specific and practical actions (known as "stepping stones"), which are commitments that we have already made through the conferences on the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr. President, in our view, verification fosters confidence: it starts with dialogue, and it grows through developing the structures, capacities, mechanisms and protocols in which the parties place their trust. Both the State taking disarmament measures and the verification authority, as well as the rest of the international community, take verification as proof that processes are effective, which builds confidence in all pillars of the system. I would like to conclude by pointing out the importance of transparency in verification processes. For my delegation, transparency is an essential part of these processes, as it confirms that progress is being made and that real and effective disarmament is taking place. Verification and transparency can therefore help to build bridges between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States by facilitating the exchange of information and improving

international security conditions. Spain would support a credible multilateral verification regime, on which all States could rely.

The President: I thank Ambassador Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies and I give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the distinguished delegate of Argentina, Ms. Porta.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all, Mr. President, to congratulate you on opening the second part of the session of the Conference on Disarmament, and to congratulate Ambassador Kauppi of Finland on her recent appointment as Permanent Representative of her country in Geneva. My delegation would also like to thank Mr. Osmundsen and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research for the comprehensive and substantive presentation given to the Conference.

Mr. President, disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are priorities for Argentina in the context of a robust peaceful nuclear programme. Strict respect for the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is a guarantee of sustainable progress based on the three pillars of the Treaty.

Argentina considers that it is essential to move towards the goal of general and complete nuclear disarmament in an irreversible, verifiable and transparent manner. My delegation appreciates the codification of the prohibition of nuclear weapons as a legitimate necessity in view of the humanitarian consequences of such weapons, and recognizes the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Nevertheless, in the present circumstances, Argentina considers that priority should be given to strengthening and preserving the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime as a whole, with the Non-Proliferation Treaty as its cornerstone. Care should be taken to avoid overlap or the establishment of alternative legal sources to the regime, the provisions of which, particularly in the area of verification, are already universally accepted. The participation of nuclear-possessor States in the negotiation of such measures is also crucial for their effectiveness.

Argentina considers the verification of nuclear disarmament to be fundamental and to apply not only to non-proliferation instruments but also in the field of disarmament. The work on the verification of nuclear disarmament, such as that carried out by the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification in 2018–2019 and what will be done in 2021–2022, in which my country is involved, is a significant contribution; as part of a process granted formality and legitimacy by its taking place under the auspices of the United Nations, it can lay the foundations for concrete progress in the development of a robust verification regime for future multilateral disarmament agreements, without undermining the progress made in the area of non-proliferation. Likewise, in view of the upcoming Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which will be chaired by Argentina, exchanges on nuclear disarmament verification could be a great contribution to the disarmament cluster of the Review Conference.

Mr. President, Argentina recognizes the importance of responding to legitimate demands to achieve disarmament, which will help to level the playing field with regard to the fulfilment of the commitments undertaken by the States Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Given that this will be a lengthy process on a complex international scene where progress in this field will be difficult to achieve, the verification of nuclear disarmament emerges as a concrete step towards the future goal of a world without nuclear weapons. This is not intended to influence future negotiators of multilateral disarmament agreements, but to provide effective technical tools and the continuous capacity-building necessary to ensure that they can be brought to bear when the time comes, on the understanding that the debates necessary to grant the legitimacy that a process of this nature requires will have already taken place.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty, together with the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty, would preclude the possibility of a global nuclear arsenal build-up and thus contribute to its total elimination in the future.

Argentina appreciates the efforts made as part of initiatives and contributions by States and the academic and scientific community to identify tools to strengthen cooperation,

education and the dissemination of credible alternatives for the verification of nuclear disarmament.

I would also like to refer to the unique experience of Argentina and Brazil in the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials, which may provide valuable contributions and lessons learned with regard to verification from a non-proliferation standpoint as a cooperation, confidence-building and transparency measure, and from the standpoint of its usefulness in inspections. Without prejudice to this, it should be borne in mind that the Agency's area of competence is limited to nuclear non-proliferation and not to disarmament.

Lastly, my delegation would like to stress the role of non-nuclear-possessor States in legitimizing a disarmament process and its verification, especially under article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Capacity-building is the key to ensuring that all States, whether nuclear-possessors or non-nuclear-possessors, can contribute to and participate in this process.

The President: I thank the distinguished delegate of Argentina for her statement. I give the floor to the next speaker on the list, Ambassador Beerwerth of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Mr. President, I would also like to welcome Ambassador Kauppi, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Conference on Disarmament. I wish her well for her assignment in Geneva and look forward to our cooperation.

In the context of agenda item 1, which we are discussing today, let me begin by reiterating that Germany very much welcomes the extension of the New START between Russia and the United States at the last possible moment, so to speak. This has averted a situation that would have been detrimental to the collective security interests of us all. It has averted the collapse of the last pillar of the nuclear disarmament architecture erected between Russia and the United States in previous decades.

The preservation of that agreement gives me hope that the phase of the dismantlement of sound agreements has come to an end, regardless of, or perhaps I should say because of, a strained international security climate.

Today, Mr. President, we need nuclear disarmament just as much as we needed it in the past. Actually, we need it even more in light of the security situation in a multipolar world. Verified nuclear disarmament enhances confidence and stability. We need nuclear disarmament in a step-by-step approach. That brings me to nuclear disarmament verification.

I would like to congratulate Jørn Osmundsen on his designation as Chair of the new Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification and thank both him and Pavel Podvig for their lucid and informative presentations.

Mr. President, transparency and compliance mechanisms, that is, verification, are an essential part of any future disarmament agreement, be it bilateral or multilateral, in particular, as I said, in a strained international arms control and disarmament environment. Verification has, of course, been used successfully in the bilateral nuclear arms control treaties between Russia and the United States, in which there is ample experience with concepts, methods and techniques of verification.

We also believe, however, that non-nuclear-weapon States can contribute to further developing verification too. Multilateral work on verification covering the entire cycle of a nuclear weapon can thus help to foster political rapprochement on more general issues regarding future nuclear arms control and disarmament.

This is why the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification is an important instrument in advancing substantive work on the matter, as well as in enhancing confidence and trust. We are looking forward to the commencement of the 2021–2022 sessions. The German expert will participate actively in its deliberations. Refinement and further practical testing of verification concepts, procedures and arrangements are key to achieving significant reductions in nuclear arsenals in the future.

In order to bridge the time until the beginning of the work of the new Group of Governmental Experts and to assist with its preparation, Germany held three seminars on

nuclear disarmament verification in June and September 2020 and just recently in May 2021, in cooperation with the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. These seminars dealt with conceptual as well as practical aspects of nuclear disarmament verification. They attracted a high level of attendance, which we read as a testimony to the importance of this issue.

The International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which has already been mentioned by several of my colleagues, is another forum that can help in developing further work on disarmament verification. Germany also participates actively in this endeavour. In that context, together with France, we carried out a new disarmament verification field exercise in September 2019 as a concrete step towards developing reliable and sound multilateral nuclear disarmament verification procedures. You will recall that my French colleague and I briefed the Conference on Disarmament on this a while ago.

As we said, this practical exercise demonstrated that nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States alike can successfully cooperate on nuclear disarmament verification. The exercise has proven that credible and robust verification is possible without compromising proliferation-sensitive information.

In continuation of this exercise, France and Germany will be launching a new disarmament verification exercise, DV2021. This new exercise will be similar in respect of its goals, scope and scenario, but will be adapted according to the organizers' experiences, as well as on the basis of lessons learned and remarks provided by participants and evaluators. We will, of course, be happy to brief the Conference on Disarmament on the conclusion and evaluation of this exercise on the experience gained.

The President: I thank Ambassador Beerwerth for his statement. I now give the floor to the next speaker, the distinguished delegate of the Russian Federation, Mr. Andrey Belousov.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, I welcome the resumption of our work and thank the Bulgarian presidency for organizing a thematic meeting on item 1 of the Conference's agenda. Although, in truth, the theme itself is highly controversial. Essentially, we are being invited to discuss the verification of what is gradually, before our very eyes, being relegated to history. This sad fact is a source of both deep regret and serious concern. I stress that Russia remains open to engaging with all States Members of the United Nations to revitalize the nuclear disarmament process, the logical conclusion of which would be the complete elimination of nuclear arsenals.

We are convinced that, before addressing verification issues directly, the international community should first develop a realistic model of multilateral nuclear disarmament, taking into account the constellation of issues affecting strategic stability and ensuring the participation of all States that possess military nuclear capabilities. Such an approach has been universally accepted and is clearly set out in the documents adopted within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons review process. In particular, it is encapsulated in the words "in a way that promotes international stability, peace and undiminished and increased security". This is action 5 of the 2010 action plan. Until this goal is reached, it is premature to focus on creating "tools" for hypothetical future treaties.

It is clear that such nuclear disarmament will take place gradually, and practical steps leading to the reduction, limitation and ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons could include unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures, each of them requiring appropriate control mechanisms agreed upon by the parties.

The international community has long been working on the verification of disarmament and arms control agreements and the formulation of principles on the basis of which verification could be carried out. In particular, the basic principles of verification in the area of disarmament are set out in the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, of 1978, and were also endorsed by the Disarmament Commission in its 1988 report on verification in all its aspects.

Let me remind you of the key principles. First, the universal rules of international law, particularly non-interference in the internal affairs of States, should be respected. Second, verification procedures depend on the aims, scope, nature and extent of the obligations as

defined in each agreement. Third, verification measures must be reliable, realistic and economically feasible.

It is critical that a verification mechanism be linked to each specific agreement. After all, each international legal instrument in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation will be unique and have its own specific characteristics.

Of course, considerable experience in the verification of agreements has now been accumulated and, accordingly, there is a certain set of verification methods and procedures. These include national technical means, on-site inspections, telemetric information exchange, notifications and the like. As mentioned, the requirements and particularities of a specific agreement determine which of them will be used. There is no “universal” model of a verification mechanism, and there are no “mandatory” verification procedures. All the modalities should be developed during the negotiation of that specific agreement.

It is also important to bear in mind that monitoring is not an end in itself; it is merely an important and integral element of the process of reaching agreements. As noted in paragraph 31 of the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, international agreements “should provide for adequate measures of verification satisfactory to all parties concerned in order to create the necessary confidence and ensure that they are being observed by all parties”. Trust and greater openness will contribute to the increased effectiveness of verification measures.

Under international law, verification of compliance with an agreement is the exclusive prerogative of the parties to it. It should be borne in mind that arms control and disarmament agreements are inextricably linked to national security issues. Accordingly, the information obtained through verification procedures is often, if not always, proliferation-sensitive. The guarantee here is strict compliance by the parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty with their obligations thereunder, in particular articles I and II. The parties therefore agree in advance, through negotiation, on the nature and volume of information that they will exchange. The parties also establish a confidentiality regime.

I would like to point out that Russia is not opposed to discussing verification. We are ready to cooperate within the framework of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. However, we call on delegations to take a cautious approach to the issue of verification, ensuring that it remains anchored in the general context of article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

We are not opposed to examining different approaches to nuclear disarmament verification. The Group’s report is expected to consider and set out some verification models that can then be implemented. For us, a State with vast experience in nuclear disarmament, it is important that the ideas and approaches put forward by the Group are based on the principles that I have mentioned. At the same time, any recommendations on nuclear disarmament verification should not be allowed to become an obsession or overriding concerns, imposing some binding framework on countries participating in the nuclear arms elimination process.

Once again, I stress that nuclear disarmament verification mechanisms should be linked to the treaty concerned. It would be unacceptable, in our view, if future agreements were tailored to models or standards of the verification process, even if those have been agreed in a multilateral setting.

We call on all interested States to take the necessary steps to strengthen the existing arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation system and to develop new agreements in this area, including on the basis of the points that I have made today.

Lastly, I would like to thank Pavel Podvig of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research for his excellent and informative presentation.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation for his statement and now I give the floor to Mr. Ichiro Ogasawara, the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Mr. President, as this is the first time I have taken the floor under your presidency, let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of this

important responsibility. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you carry out your duties.

I also highly appreciate the two important presentations we had the pleasure to hear at the beginning of today's meeting.

Mr. President, as the only country ever to have suffered atomic bombing during war, Japan will spare no efforts to realize a world free of nuclear weapons. Hiroshima and Nagasaki must never be repeated. As hibakusha – atomic bomb survivors – are ageing, it is becoming increasingly important to pass down, to future generations and beyond borders, the reality of devastation and the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

The Government of Japan will work with atomic bomb survivors in its efforts to promote understanding of what the use of nuclear weapons is really like. Through the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme, Japan has, continuously since 1983, invited young foreign diplomats to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where participants have the opportunity to learn first-hand about the experiences of hibakusha.

To date, 958 fellows have travelled to Japan under this programme. To our utmost delight, we have found many alumni of this programme among diplomats from all over the world and officials of international organizations who are involved in the activities of the Conference on Disarmament. We will continue our efforts in this direction.

Mr. President, it is undeniable that we are living in a severe and unstable security environment with growing international tensions. This reality must be taken into account when taking measures to reach our shared goal – the realization of a world without nuclear weapons. Based on these viewpoints, Japan advocates a realistic and practical approach to nuclear disarmament. This approach has underpinned the resolutions that Japan has submitted to the General Assembly since 1994.

In this approach, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is of primordial importance, as the cornerstone of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It is imperative that the tenth Review Conference of the States parties to the Treaty should achieve a meaningful outcome. All State parties, both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States, should unite and join forces to realize this shared purpose. Japan has taken initiatives to this end.

Last year, Japan submitted to the General Assembly a draft original resolution on joint courses of action and future-oriented dialogue, which was adopted with 150 votes in favour.

In 2017, Japan also launched the Group of Eminent Persons for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament process, on which I would like to elaborate later. In this realistic and practical approach, Japan prioritizes both “decapping by comprehensively banning nuclear testing and quantity capping by banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices”.

Japan calls for the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and calls on all States, in particular the eight remaining States we see listed in annex 2, to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay.

In the Conference on Disarmament, Japan calls for the early commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty as the highest priority and regrets deeply that this august body has failed to start tackling this long overdue task this year again.

Mr. President, to conceive ways beyond the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and a fissile material cut-off treaty leading to the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons, we should address the so-called hard questions, including, inter alia, the relationship between nuclear deterrence and the nuclear disarmament.

The Group of Eminent Persons focused on these hard questions. In October 2019, the Group published its Chair's report, full of insights and inspiring thoughts, illustrating further steps towards nuclear disarmament. My delegation had the pleasure to send a copy of the report to all Conference on Disarmament member States.

In order to build upon the outcomes of this work, Japan has evolved the Group into a track 1.5 meeting, with the participation of both governmental and non-governmental

representatives. On 9 March this year, the Government of Japan hosted the second track 1.5 meeting. Novel ideas and fresh point of views were expressed, which I hope to share with you in due course.

Mr. President, in the presence of Ambassador Osmundsen, Chair of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which will begin its work this year, I would also like to briefly touch up on nuclear disarmament verification. Japan underscores the indispensable role of effective and credible nuclear disarmament verification for a promotion of nuclear disarmament.

Japan has made substantive contributions to the work of both the Group of Governmental Experts and the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. For the success of these exercises, engagement by both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States is essential. As a non-nuclear-weapon State, Japan has amassed highly advanced expertise and technologies through its long and wide-ranging experience of the safeguard activities conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency related to its peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Taking full advantage of these experiences and knowledge, Japan continues to make substantive contributions to the international endeavours orchestrated by Ambassador Osmundsen. Japan encourages the new experts to substantively deepen the discussion on further conceptual and practical work on verification, based on the final report of the previous Group of Governmental Experts, published in April 2019.

Mr. President, to conclude I would like to reiterate the importance of consensus-building efforts, especially as the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is approaching.

Japan has actively participated in the work of various cross-regional groups such as the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, the Stockholm Initiative and the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative. These groups add great value to our common endeavours to achieve our shared goal of realizing a world free of nuclear weapons.

Through our own efforts and with such groups, Japan will continue to engage in bridge-building and try to overcome the gaps between countries and groups with different standpoints. We must focus on what unites us, rather than what divides us.

The President: I thank the Ambassador Ogasawara for his statement. We are approaching the end of our plenary meeting this morning. I still have several speakers remaining on my list and it seems that we will not be able to conclude the discussion this morning. We will therefore have to continue our thematic debate tomorrow.

Before concluding today's meeting, I would like to thank our panellists for their contributions to our discussion today but also for their availability to take part in our meeting tomorrow as well. I also thank all the colleagues who took the floor today in the thematic discussion on the Conference's agenda item 1, with a focus on nuclear disarmament verification.

I take this opportunity to inform the Conference that the secretariat has received a request from Saudi Arabia to become a member of this Conference. As is standard practice, this request will be reflected in the final report of the Conference.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at noon.