

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 10 August 2021, at 11.50 a.m.

President: Ms. Leslie E. Norton (Canada)



The President: I call to order the 1587th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, I would like to start by saying a few words about the two plenary meetings we had last week. I am disappointed that we could not agree on updating the rules of procedure to have them reflect the equality of men and women in the Conference on Disarmament despite support from a large majority of delegations. That said, I am thankful to all of you for participating in the discussion on this important topic.

My assessment is that we will not achieve consensus on this issue during this final week of Canada's presidency, but I encourage States to continue informal discussions. I have not heard any objections to the principle of equality and I believe that a future presidency will make another attempt to update the rules in a manner that reflects our common values and practice. What we have achieved is the beginning of a conversation and, as some delegations have noted, a time may come that is right to make these changes. Let us hope that it will be soon.

Let me move then to the focus of today's plenary meeting, during which we will discuss document CD/2197, submitted last year as an official document by the delegation of Australia. As you know, during its presidency, Australia undertook extensive consultations asking States about their views on the Conference on Disarmament and how to move forward. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper was not put to the Conference for discussion. During our informal consultations, several States expressed an interest in discussing this paper. CD/2197 is the result of the hard work done not only by Australia but also by those States that offered their input for the paper.

At this point, I would like to give the floor to Ambassador Mansfield of Australia so that she can introduce the paper and provide some background information.

Ms. Mansfield (Australia): Madam President, my delegation would like to thank Canada for convening this meeting today. We are indeed very pleased that the Conference on Disarmament has an opportunity to discuss the working paper CD/2197. The paper is the one that summarizes the consultations that we undertook during our Conference presidency last year.

In opening the discussions today, we thought it would be useful to briefly outline our thinking in conducting those consultations in the course of mid-2020, the context in which we did so and the key areas of focus for those consultations. No doubt delegations will recall that our plans for the presidency were very much interrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our presidency commenced in March 2020 and was to run in two parts. The two weeks in March and then two weeks in May/June; the 2020 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference should have taken place in between those two periods. But as neither the Conference on Disarmament nor the Review Conference could proceed to meet during that time, we had to think creatively about how we could best use our presidency in the service of the Conference on Disarmament. If we value this body, we ought to think about it. If we value the work that this body does, then reflecting from time to time on that work seems to us to be a useful thing that we could do. And given we had a fairly long period in which to do so, essentially running from early March to early June, we thought that we could contribute in this way. So it was in that context that we thought a good use of our time would be to listen to the views of Conference members and observers and to take the temperature of Conference delegations.

So as we all started to realize the possibilities that the world of Zoom and Webex presented and to see that the period of lockdown did not have to be a period in which nothing happened, we embarked on the process of setting up an extensive agenda of virtual bilateral calls. We were not able to speak to every Conference delegation, but we did speak with over 40 members and observers.

We invited Conference delegates to share their views on the priorities and on the role of the Conference and on ways to break the deadlock and to be more effective. Specifically, we canvassed views on which security or arms control issues were the most important to

Conference delegations and on which issues delegations thought negotiations within the Conference could help.

We sought views on what delegations would like the Conference to negotiate over the next 5 to 10 years and indeed on how the Conference could build consensus on such negotiations.

We asked for input on ideas for breaking the deadlock over the programme of work, what a programme of work is or should be, and what its role is, and views on how we could make the Conference more effective.

We conducted the consultations on a confidential basis with the key findings to be shared on a not-for-attribution basis. We wanted this to encourage Conference members to be fulsome and frank, and I want to thank all those delegations with which we met for indeed meeting in that spirit, because it was clear that many delegations saw this as an opportunity to think afresh about the Conference.

The result was the working paper CD/2197. While Australia drafted it, and of course it reflects the way we saw the meetings unfold, the views are not Australian views. We genuinely tried to make this a shared product to summarize the views that we heard from all of you.

I will not attempt today to summarize those findings. They are clearly set out in the paper and I went into some more detail when I addressed this body on 30 June 2020. But what I would like to do is to again thank all of you for the really constructive approach that your delegations took to this exercise and to encourage all delegations to again contribute to that discussion in the same spirit today.

We wanted to start a conversation. We do not know where that will go but we did feel it was important that the Conference on Disarmament took time, took the opportunity – as all institutions should – to reflect on its role, its priorities and how it does what it does. So perhaps we can use some more time to that end today.

In closing, let me again thank you, Madam President, for facilitating this discussion today. We really look forward to hearing from you in what I have no doubt will be an ongoing conversation.

The President: I thank Ambassador Mansfield for her statement. Before I open the floor to other delegations, I would like to make a few remarks on behalf of my own country, Canada.

First, I would like to thank Australia for undertaking this work and presenting it to the Conference on Disarmament today. I am also grateful to all the other States that provided input to this paper. For Canada, the Conference's main priority should remain the negotiation of legally binding disarmament instruments. As long as that eludes us, however, we believe that international peace and security could be enhanced if Conference members came to consensus on norms or codes of conduct or other measures related to the agenda items. Here, it is also necessary to highlight the importance of operating in a spirit of consensus, with members only breaking consensus as a final resort to avert decisions detrimental to their national interest.

On Canada's priorities, we continue to believe that negotiations in the Conference on a treaty to end fissile material production is a timely, well developed and widely supported measure both among Conference members and globally.

Outer space security is another important area for the Conference to address. That includes consideration of an agreement to ban anti-satellite weapons tests that produce space debris.

Implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is also a priority, and Canada has embraced cross-regional groups as a way to strengthen its implementation. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament have together devised practical recommendations to advance all three pillars of the Treaty at the upcoming Review Conference.

I now open the floor to any other delegation that wishes to speak on document CD/2197. The first speaker on my list is the Ambassador of the United States of America. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President, for convening this incredibly important plenary meeting and thank you to Australia for compiling this paper. Prior to last week, I would have said that today's session had the potential to be the most productive discussion we have had in years. After the debacle at the previous plenary, I can now honestly say it is also the most important discussion we could possibly have at this juncture of the Conference on Disarmament.

Australia's paper covers the gamut of issues, and there are a few things that stand out to me and my delegation.

On the question of the priorities and role of the Conference, for the most part, the paper captures what we would expect on the core agenda items. We have heard the same range of views in our thematic debates this year. I was, however, interested by the notion that the Conference's agenda could benefit from a shake-up – that it does not reflect contemporary or emerging threats, including biological and cyberthreats.

Maybe making a change to the Conference's core agenda items is a good idea. Maybe it is not. Candidly, it is not something that the United States has debated internally for some time. That said, if there are ideas out there about how to make the Conference agenda more relevant, more in keeping with the world we live in and the threats we see coming down the road, then the United States wants to hear those ideas. We want to have that discussion.

We are also interested in discussing the ideas put forward in the paper regarding how to do the groundwork that would be necessary for us to even consider starting negotiations on any topic. And therein lies the crux of the problem and the reason this paper and this debate are so important. There is no way for us to have these discussions, or any of the hard substantive discussions that we need to have, unless we seriously consider the other two pieces of Australia's paper: How do we break the deadlock over a programme of work and how can we be more effective?

On the programme of work, this paper neatly forecasts the first 10 weeks of the 2021 session. We, as a body, do not agree on whether or not the programme of work has to include a negotiation mandate. I understand that many strongly believe that the programme of work has to include at least a reference to our negotiation mandate, that to do otherwise risks the Conference's going even further astray. For our part, the United States believes that the programme of work should set the course for the year – whatever that course may be – much as Algeria's proposal last year and Belgium's proposal this year would have done.

So, we are in a catch-22 situation. We may need to discuss what the programme of work needs to be, but having that discussion means that we have to talk about something that is not the negotiation of a core agenda item, but which is the very issue that prevents us from adopting a programme of work.

I also want to note that, according to the paper, a number of delegations think that the leadership of the permanent members of the Security Council is instrumental to breaking this deadlock. Again, I understand, and even agree with, that sentiment. However, I need to point out that during the debates on the programme of work this year, there was at least one version that all the permanent members of the Security Council could agree to. It was not enough.

Which leads me to what I believe is the lynchpin of what Australia asked and what we should be seriously discussing: How can we make the Conference on Disarmament more effective?

The ideas presented in this paper range from the broad – and difficult – question of how to depoliticize the Conference to the very specific – and seemingly easy – request that Conference document symbols should note the year in which they were produced – that is, rather than "CD/1299", it would read "CD/1299-95", or something along those lines. The United States is open to considering all of these questions.

We also think we need to look at the question of membership. Rule 2 of the rules of procedure states that "the membership of the Conference will be reviewed at regular

intervals". "Regular intervals" is not defined, but I believe we last reviewed Conference on Disarmament membership in 1999 – and that does not seem "regular" to the United States. I also note that there are at least 25 pending membership requests.

I want to make it clear that the United States is not taking a position on whether or not we should expand the membership. We are simply stating that we, as a body, need to review the requests. And we should probably consider how frequently the Conference should review its membership so that it is done at regular intervals.

The question of membership could include not only addressing enlargement of the Conference but also looking at a reduction in membership.

In a similar vein, the United States believes it is time to review how we manage the presidency of the Conference. We have done so before. In 1994, we amended rule 12 to pass the presidency on to the next year's President at the time the final report is adopted.

Is four weeks per presidency the optimal time frame, or should we consider changing it? Are there lessons learned from the last two years of working in the "P6 plus 2" format – which ensures coordination between the six Presidents of a session, the last President of the previous session and the first of the next – that we should consider incorporating into the rules of procedure?

Should we consider adopting criteria for holding the presidency of the Conference on? I know that's a very politically sensitive question, but we should be able to discuss it.

Madam President, I do not have the answers to the questions posed in the paper or to the ones I have posed today. However, I can categorically state that if our job, as the Conference on Disarmament, is to negotiate international arms control and disarmament instruments, then it is also our job to keep this body running. We have to be the chief operating officer as well as the negotiating team. We cannot do that – I repeat, we cannot do that – unless we talk about and make decisions about the actual functioning of the Conference. We also need to be willing to make changes when they make sense.

I referenced last week's so-called debate at the beginning of my remarks. The notion that there is no systemic discrimination associated with the current rules of procedure is a prime example of the alternate universe some delegations insist on trapping the Conference in. Can anyone in this room honestly say that refusing to discuss these issues is getting us any closer to actually starting the negotiations so many have proposed?

I believe the answer is clear. I believe that a number of delegations are well aware of the fact that refusing to talk about anything other than the core mandate is actually pushing us further away from negotiations, and that they are just fine with that fact.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his statement and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Last week I said after our debate that I would not like to address you any more as "Madam President", since we believe that the simple linguistic changes you proposed should have been agreed by consensus in this body. Certainly, since all the States represented here echoed their wishes for gender equality, I echo your words that this subject will stay on our agenda and will one day be decided upon by consensus and I will no longer have to address you as "Madam President".

My delegation would like to thank you and the former Australian presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for putting the Australian paper CD/2197 on our agenda for discussion today, and I would like to thank Ambassador Mansfield for her introduction at this session.

The Netherlands has long called for debate on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. In light of the experience of the past few years, such a debate is more than timely, and we hope that we can build on the discussions held under the Vietnamese presidency in 2019.

In my intervention, I will mainly focus on the programme of work of the Conference. As you may recall, the Netherlands submitted a working paper on this topic in 2019 entitled "Back to basics – the Programme of Work" (CD/2165) with the aim of moving the

Conference on Disarmament forward by looking critically at the organization of our work. The working paper argues that the Conference should return to its origins and organize its work based on the programme of work as intended in the rules of procedure and the common practice in the first 15 years of its existence.

In the period 1978–1992 the Conference successfully adopted its programme of work, which only contained a schedule of activities that allocated time for substantive work on agenda items in the plenary meetings of the Conference. Thus, the programme of work merely served as a planning tool. The subsidiary bodies were established only once consensus emerged on their mandate for each agenda item separately. However, in the last two decades, and more precisely from the 1999 session onward, efforts have focused merely on grouping different mandates together linking the programme of work and the establishment of subsidiary bodies. This has led to a stalemate that has eroded the status and the standing of the Conference.

The working paper by the Netherlands identified three interrelated problems. One, disagreement on the mandate of a single subsidiary body prevents substantive work on all agenda items. Two, the programme of work has become a goal in itself instead of a planning tool. Three, the substantive work of the Conference has been replaced by procedural debates on the organization of work.

To resolve these interrelated problems, the working paper suggests we turn to the well-established and functioning practice of using the programme of work as a planning tool for the plenary meetings of the session ahead and delinking it from the establishment of subsidiary bodies, which should be done through a separate decision.

Separating the programme of work from the establishment of subsidiary bodies is fully in line with the existing rules of procedure. Furthermore, this approach offers a pragmatic way forward which has proved to be successful in the past. Finally, it allows the Conference to focus on the substance of its agenda rather than on the procedural issues which have stalled progress for far too long.

With these considerations in mind, the Netherlands encourages all delegations to revisit the working paper and to return to the origins of the successful work of the Conference on Disarmament based on the programme of work, as intended in the rules of procedure and used in the first 15 years of its existence.

Finally let me echo the European Union position on the composition of this body, in that we agree that this body can have new members.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement. I now give the floor to the delegate of India.

Ms. Narayanan (India): Madam President, we have already spoken on this topic during the informal plenary today, but for the record, and in the spirit of engagement, my delegation takes the floor once again.

The past one and a half years have been an unprecedented time for all of us due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as we try to adapt to the new modalities of our work and continue the important work of the Conference on Disarmament during this period, it has not been possible to snap out of the Conference's long-standing stalemate.

That the Conference has not been able to adopt a programme of work for almost 25 years, with the exception of 2009 – though even then it could not be implemented – is an indication of the chronic lack of political will keeping the Conference on Disarmament from negotiating legally binding instruments in accordance with its mandate. As the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum mandated by the General Assembly at its first special session on disarmament, the Conference has an agenda that deals with critical challenges of disarmament and international security. India supports a comprehensive and balanced programme of work to enable the Conference to commence negotiations in fulfilment of its mandate.

In view of the great danger posed by nuclear weapons to humankind, it is essential for the international community to take urgent steps towards the realization of the goal of their complete elimination. India is committed to the goal of universal non-discriminatory and

verifiable nuclear disarmament and has called for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a step-by-step process, as outlined in our working paper on nuclear disarmament submitted to the Conference in 2007 (CD/1816).

In the working paper, India urges the international community to intensify dialogue so as to build a consensus and initiate concrete steps towards achieving the goal of nuclear disarmament based on the following elements: reaffirmation of the unequivocal commitment of all nuclear-weapon States to the goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons; reduction of the salience of nuclear weapons and security doctrines, taking into account the global reach and menace of nuclear weapons; adoption of measures by nuclear-weapon States to reduce nuclear danger, including the risks of accidental nuclear war, and de-alerting of nuclear weapons to prevent unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons; negotiation of a global agreement among nuclear-weapon States on “no first use” of nuclear weapons; negotiation of a universal and legally binding agreement on non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States; negotiation of a convention on the complete prohibition of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; and negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to the global non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame.

India reiterates its call to undertake these steps, as outlined in the working paper, including the negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament of a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention, as also called for by the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 21.

Without prejudice to the priority we attach to nuclear disarmament, India supports the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein, which remains the most suitable basis for negotiations, as also endorsed by the Group of Governmental Experts on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices and the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group.

India considers that negotiations on such a treaty are the most mature subject for the Conference on Disarmament to take up, and we reaffirm our readiness to participate in such negotiations in the Conference.

The prevention of an arms race in outer space is another long-standing item on the Conference agenda. India looks forward to an early start of negotiations on a legally binding instrument on this subject to address pressing issues relating to space security.

The issue of negative security assurances has been on the agenda of the Conference since 1979. The Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament called upon nuclear-weapon States to take steps to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We believe that non-nuclear-weapon States have a legitimate right to be assured against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

India supported General Assembly resolution 75/34, which recommends that the Conference on Disarmament actively continue intensive negotiations on the issue of negative security assurances. As a member of the Group of 21 and the Non-Aligned Movement, India has supported the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument on security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States as a matter of priority.

India supports the upholding of the rule of consensus for decision-making in the Conference, as that is the only guarantee for complete ownership and universal acceptance of Conference decisions by its member States.

One of the factors that could help break the deadlock is better communication and greater interaction among Conference members and observers through more consultations, including informal consultations. These would lead to better understanding of each other's positions and views, thereby fostering mutual respect and helping us find common ground.

Madam President, India stands ready to fulfil its part in this endeavour and to work with fellow member States to achieve our collective goals.

The President: I thank the delegate of India for her statement and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Madam President. In the planning of the work of the Conference on Disarmament, it is both necessary and beneficial to arrange for discussions among member States around such issues as the programme of work of the Conference, priority agenda items, modalities of work and so on.

However, it is not appropriate for this discussion to revolve solely around document CD/2197. That document is a summary of the communications with all parties during the presidency of Australia last year, but it is not sufficient to constitute the sole basis for our in-depth exchange of views on these issues. The summary of positions in it is somewhat one-sided; for example, on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, the document says not a word about negotiating a new international arms control treaty. What's more, it is only a document from last year.

During this year's session of the Conference, thanks to the joint efforts of the rotating Presidents, the member States of the Conference have engaged in more frank and in-depth discussions around important agenda items. These efforts should also form the basis of our discussions in this plenary session today.

I will now also briefly share some of the views of my delegation on the duties of the Conference President and the group of the six Presidents of the current session, together with the last President of the previous session and the first of the next session (P6 plus 2), the programme of work, Conference agenda priorities, and improving our working methods.

First, with regard to the duties of the Conference President and the P6 plus 2 mechanism, the rules of procedure of the Conference do not clearly stipulate the duties of the President. However, based on rule 6 of the rules of procedure, which stipulates how the Conference should conduct its work, the role of the President, in our view, should be to guide the members of the Conference in their efforts to work in a consensual manner. The President, as a representative of a member State, should of course contribute his or her country's wisdom as well as his or her own personal talents to the work of the Conference but should not impose his or her country's or his or her own personal will on the member States. The President must fully respect the views and concerns of all member States, reflect their collective unity, always work to maintain the unity of the member States and avoid confrontation and division; this is the correct expression of the President's leadership.

I have noted that many rotating Presidents have carried out their work with precisely this attitude. We highly appreciate their efforts and contributions.

In particular, I would like to point out that the P6 plus 2 mechanism is a major improvement in the way the Conference works. It not only ensures communication, coordination and brainstorming among the rotating Presidents within a given year but also promotes continuity in the work of the Conference from year to year. Combined with the consultations among the Conference Presidents and the regional coordinators, this mechanism has further advanced the transparency and planning of the work of the Conference.

China stands ready to work with all parties to continue to actively promote the work of the Conference in a fair, transparent and open manner through the aforementioned mechanism.

Secondly, regarding the programme of work of the Conference, as the name implies, it is a programme of work, so it must first serve the objectives and mandate of that work. In the current situation, enabling the Conference to carry out substantive work is the correct direction in which to break the deadlock.

The successful experience of 2018 is worth continuing to build on. Even if, for various reasons, it was difficult to agree on a programme of work, it was necessary to shape the arrangements for the meetings so that member States could have substantive discussions around various important agenda items. This is precisely what has been done over the last two years.

The coordinated efforts of this year's rotating Presidents have made it possible for us to conduct substantive discussions on various agenda items through plenary meetings, thus enabling the views of all parties to be entered into the official records of the meeting, which was also a new experiment.

Of course, this delegation still hopes that next year's session of the Conference will continue the practice of 2018 and reach a comprehensive and balanced programme of work to prepare for treaty negotiations by establishing the relevant subsidiary bodies and carrying out substantive work.

Thirdly, regarding the topics and priorities of the Conference, from the time that the mandate of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament was established until now, the items discussed by the Conference have evolved and become more substantial. However, looking ahead, the direction of our work should hew closer to the realities of international security and the practical needs of maintaining global peace and security.

As priority issues of the Conference, nuclear disarmament, the prevention of nuclear war, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and security assurances for non-nuclear States are all closely bound up with global strategic security and stability, and are also closely linked with the legitimate security interests of Conference members. There are also logical internal relationships among them.

The current international political and security landscape is undergoing its most profound evolution since the end of the cold war. The different views and ideas of member States on the topics and priorities of the Conference are based on their different international situations and security environments, as well as their different strategic perspectives and security concerns. This is entirely normal. During such a historical period, it is all the more important for member States to uphold the principle of undiminished security for all countries, adhere to a comprehensive, objective and balanced attitude and perspective, strive to broaden consensus through frank and in-depth discussions and communications and work towards common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. This is the irreplaceably important value of the Conference on Disarmament.

Fourthly, on improving the efficiency of the work of the Conference, the heavy politicization in which the Conference has been mired in recent years has had a hugely negative impact on the working atmosphere of the Conference. What is fortunate is that we all have the hope that the things that happened in the past are now just bygones. We should all be looking forward in working together to advance the work of the Conference.

Logically speaking, increasing the efficiency of the work of the Conference and improving its working methods should be an issue of common concern for all member States and one for which they seek a common solution. Why are some member States so cautious about this? To put it bluntly, it is because they fear that the consensus rules of procedure of the Conference will be weakened and undermined and that their own rights and dignity as members of the Conference will be violated or even stripped away.

As I said in my statement last week, consensus is the soul of the work of the Conference on Disarmament, reflecting, as it does, the equality and mutual respect among member States and the high degree of responsibility they are willing to bear for the security interests of all countries and for the work of the Conference. That work has a bearing on the security interests of all countries, and the legitimate security concerns of each country must be fully taken into account and respected. Only in this way can the outcome of the work of the Conference stand the test of history.

In the actual work of the Conference, we should first view member States as equal and mutually respected partners in dialogue, patiently listen to and understand the positions of all parties, give due attention and treatment to the concerns, opinions and proposals of different member States and strive to seek consensus rather than creating confrontation or even unfairly labelling, stereotyping and stigmatizing the countries concerned. Only in this way can mutual trust be rebuilt and the working atmosphere of the Conference develop in a healthier direction. This will go a long way towards advancing the work of the Conference in its entirety.

Since we have all been able to create the P6 plus 2 mechanism over the past two difficult years, thus making a new attempt to advance the work of the Conference in an orderly manner, we should also have every reason to believe that the members of the Conference, on the basis of equality and mutual respect, will be able to make new efforts and achieve new progress in enhancing the efficiency of their work, improving their working methods and promoting substantive work on various topics. Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his statement and I now give the floor to the delegate of Pakistan.

Mr. Omar (Pakistan): As we are now in the formal plenary meeting, let me take the opportunity to exchange views on how to take forward the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament. Let me also take this opportunity to underscore and align ourselves with the position of the Group of 21, as expressed to you yesterday, regarding the choice of individual national working papers for discussions in a formal meeting. We are not opposed to having a general discussion per se, but the modality is a concern.

Madam President, irrespective of whether we are in the formal or informal meeting, my delegation's views remain the same. I recall them for the record.

The debate over the performance, potential and problems of this body could be more productive and results-oriented. However, in our view, this requires applying a wider and objective lens to the why and how instead of the what and when. As the age-old adage goes, "a disease known is half cured", or a proper diagnosis is half the cure. Let me briefly touch on the "why" part first.

Over the past few years, the global order, in its political, security and economic aspects, has deteriorated in many ways. A lethal blow to this order has been dealt by powerful States, through their deliberate undermining of long-standing arms control rules and norms. This order has also been weakened by their failure to fulfil their legal obligations.

Apart from this normative erosion, the growing pace of modernization of arsenals and capabilities and the integration and operationalization of new technologies across domains continue to accentuate risks, driving the arms race and fuelling antagonism, particularly among great Powers. I recall these developments and trends to underscore that they are not academic or research pursuits about the past or present. These dangers are alive, need to be acknowledged and have a direct bearing on various regions and subregions, as well as on the legitimate security interests of States.

The Conference on Disarmament remains a vital organ of the multilateral security architecture and an indispensable part of the United Nations disarmament machinery. This body's role remains unique. However, it will remain hamstrung by the effects of this tumultuous geopolitical and fragile global security order. This remains true for the larger machinery and international bodies mandated to maintain international peace and security and to control arms.

Let me now touch briefly on the "how" part. In our view, a revival of global consensus on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation is an urgent first step. This consensus must be anchored in the faithful and demonstrable adherence to international law and the fulfilment of legal obligations. It must contribute towards enhanced security for all States and it must be ensured that special exemptions and subjective strategic interests are not allowed to trump global and regional stability imperatives. Equity, non-discrimination, restraint and recognition of the legitimate interests of all States are the elements for the Conference and other constituents of the disarmament machinery to achieve meaningful outcomes.

While we are not naive and admit it will be a complex task, building trust, restoring confidence and reviving the international consensus remain the only viable option for the multilateral arms control machinery, particularly the Conference on Disarmament, to function and deliver.

For the Conference itself, within this larger context, the options for future work must be responsive to these challenges. Pursuing outdated and failed approaches will not yield results. Means and methods lacking appreciation of these larger realities have not worked for decades; nor are they likely to do so in the future.

Drawing on what has worked and what has not remains imperative. Arbitrary preferences, subjective notions of ripeness and creative drafting exercises have been tested and have proved inadequate. These actions have also prevented the Conference from addressing its most fundamental agenda item – that is, nuclear disarmament – for too long. In fact, the Conference has not been permitted for several decades to negotiate some of its oldest agenda items, which has far-reaching significance for international security. This discussion on consensus has a context.

We are convinced that the Conference has previously undertaken, and should be able to undertake, substantive work on all its agenda items. We believe there are a number of issues requiring urgent attention by the Conference, the foremost being nuclear disarmament, the *raison d'être* of the Conference.

We are mindful of the positions of Conference members and are of the view that – until we get to the point of negotiations on nuclear disarmament – negative security assurances, the prevention of nuclear war and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, as well as other emerging and contemporary issues that might command consensus, could be focused upon. Focusing on less contentious issues, among which we feel the issue of negative security assurances is relatively easy, could help build confidence.

Lastly, Madam President, the effectiveness of the Conference on Disarmament is not linked to its rules of procedure, which in our view are fine. Blaming the long-standing deadlock on the Conference's rules of procedure or methods of work does not stand the test of facts either. Several important treaties have been successfully negotiated with the same procedures and methods. We should all recognize the realities which do not allow negotiations on any item.

Going forward, we need a renewed perspective on all our agenda items, including considering emerging and contemporary issues which fall under the Conference on Disarmament's established agenda. This remains the only practical approach for the Conference.

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

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Madam President, you have actually put us in the very awkward position of having to repeat the statement and position that was already delivered a couple of minutes ago. In an informal format, the Group of 21 has already stated its concern on convening a formal meeting on the working paper CD/2197, and we fully support it. Let me repeat my intervention already delivered in today's informal meeting on the paper.

We thank Australia for its efforts during its presidency in 2020. My delegation has studied the paper the Australians prepared on the basis of their consultations with a considerable number of Conference on Disarmament member States. While we appreciate this compilation, we understand that the working paper represents one member State's – i.e., Australia's – perception of the views of the member States consulted regarding the Conference's work and function. The question is, however, whether the Conference is going to hold plenary or informal meetings to discuss any working papers submitted by any individual Conference member.

Today's informal meeting provided a venue for member States to voice whatever they need to say about each and every subject raised in Australia's working paper. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that no single subject matter identified by Australia enjoys consensus in the Conference on Disarmament, let alone the fact that almost half of the Conference members were not consulted due to lack of time and because of the pandemic situation, as indicated in the paper.

Therefore we would submit that this working paper should be treated like any other individual paper presented by any Conference member and should be conceived as Australia's recollection and analysis of the responses it received from those Conference on Disarmament members that were consulted during its presidency in 2020.

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

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Madam President, once again, I would like to say that I sincerely appreciate Australia's initiative to make a collective reflection on the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Our thanks also go to Australia for its efforts to reach out to the many Conference members and observers and to compile their views in document CD/2197. We find there are many interesting ideas contained in the document. My delegation believes a continuous and candid discussion on this issue will lead us to a better position to work cooperatively.

With regard to the issue raised by you, Madam President, my delegation supports the approach taken by the groups of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, and the six Presidents of the 2021 session, together with the last President of the 2021 session and the first of the 2022 session (P6 plus 2), who have shown a cooperative and continuous commitment to working together towards the adoption of a programme of work. At the same time, it is also true that the programme of the work has not been adopted for too many years and the annual reports of the Conference have been limited to a technical description for three years in a row.

For multilateralism to continue, we need to look at the Conference through a fresh lens in order to identify ways to revitalize its work and move forward. In this sense, we need to further narrow down the list of agenda items adopted each year or engage with more topical aspects of the core items, focusing on pressing agenda items to promote the Conference's effectiveness in addressing current security challenges.

Member States could first try to reach consensus on non-binding texts, such as rules, norms and codes of conduct, as a way of advancing substantive discussions on specific items. Establishing subsidiary bodies is also a positive step towards promoting preparatory work for meaningful conversations on core items, as we did in 2018. In this regard, we agree that the establishment of the subsidiary bodies should be separated from the adoption of the programme of work.

We cannot afford to waste any more time or effort on restoring the credibility of the Conference on Disarmament. Its chances of success will be visible if the Conference makes progress in implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty with due consideration for the initiatives outside the Conference, such as the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, and the initiative Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament, substantive discussions on risk reduction and negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The Republic of Korea stands ready to work with all other member States committed to proceeding with disarmament issues and revitalizing the Conference's work. We hope that the entire membership will work together with a clear set of goals so that the Conference can make real and meaningful progress and generate much-needed momentum for a successful outcome to the postponed Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his statement and I now give the floor to the delegate of Malaysia.

Ms. Mohd Pista (Malaysia): Madam President, Malaysia is taking the floor on behalf of the Group of 21. The Group wishes to share its views regarding the request for today's discussion to be held in informal format. These views, as you know, were shared yesterday with you and group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session, together with the last President of the 2020 session and the first of the 2022 session, and are shared today with all member States for their information.

At the outset, the Group of 21 wishes to express its appreciation for your diligent efforts and initiatives, Madam President, in pursuing the work of the Conference on Disarmament. The Group notes that various initiatives have been carried out under your presidency, including the two thematic debates on agenda items 6 and 7 as well as the formal and informal plenary meetings to discuss the draft decision on linguistic or technical updates to the Conference on Disarmament's rules of procedure to reflect the equality of men and women. The Group further notes that there will be a discussion on the Australian paper,

document CD/2197, today and a plenary meeting on youth and disarmament on 12 August 2021.

In general, the Group has always maintained its flexibility in the work of the Conference. This approach is taken to demonstrate our continued support and cooperation to all presidencies, including the presidency of Canada. The Group acknowledges and respects that it is the discretion of the President to propose any agenda items or activities for Conference on Disarmament member States' consideration. However, the Group wishes to register its concerns regarding the proposal to convene a discussion on document CD/2197 in a formal plenary format. The Group emphasizes that its concerns are not related to the content, but rather to the approach or modalities of the discussion, and the practice of convening a discussion on an individual working paper in a formal plenary format.

The Group wishes to underline that reaching a consensus on the programme of work should be the focus of the Conference rather than working on an individual working paper. The Group is supportive of any activities that enjoy consensus and can move the work of the Conference forward while contributing to bridging the gap and confidence-building within the Conference.

In view of the fact that the initial format of today's discussion was transmitted to all member States on Friday, 6 August 2021, the Group immediately shared its concerns with the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session, together with the last President of the 2020 session and the first of the 2022 session, after its coordination meeting yesterday. Mindful of the limited time that the presidency and member States may have had to make the necessary preparations for today's discussion, and to demonstrate its support of the presidency, the Group of 21 has expressed its willingness for the Conference to continue its discussion on document CD/2197. The Group therefore requested the President to consider convening this discussion in an informal format.

Madam President, the Group underscores the importance for the Conference of considering the views of all member States and greatly appreciates your consideration of the Group's request.

The President: I thank the delegate of Malaysia for her statement and I now give the floor to the delegate of Indonesia.

Mr. Rosandry (Indonesia): Madam President, since we are now in a formal setting, I would like to take this opportunity to read again our intervention that was delivered this morning. But before beginning, I would also like to echo the statement made by Malaysia on behalf of the Group of 21.

Indonesia welcomes Canada's initiative in bringing the working paper CD/2197 to our discussion today. We also appreciate Australia's preparation of the paper and its efforts in conducting consultations with more than 40 Conference on Disarmament members and observers this year. Clearly, consultation with all members will be required to find a more comprehensive answer to the question of how to break the deadlock within this body.

In multilateral forums, to encounter divergences between countries is a very common occurrence. It is even natural, as we are all bringing our own national interests and agenda. In multilateral forums like this one, we are trying to find points of convergence, common denominators and commonalities. However, when a multilateral body is not able to reach consensus for two decades on a programme of work or even to agree on a technical update, there must be something we should improve, if not repair.

We often hear the concerns of many delegates underlining the lack of good faith, political will and trust among countries. We could not agree more on this and believe there is a need to put more effort into re-establishing trust and a conducive climate for consultation and, eventually, negotiation. For that, my delegation believes there is no shortcut. We might need to listen more to each other, engage in a more constructive dialogue, understand each other's position, work harder to find common ground, show more flexibility and be more accepting of compromises.

It is not an easy task, for sure, and it takes process and time. It is even more challenging knowing that we do not fully share goals in this body. When we look at the views and inputs

from colleagues presented in the paper, there are indeed differences in priorities and approach, where one aims high and others aim low. For that, we see the crucial role that the programme of work plays.

The programme of work is instrumental in facilitating our joint work. And as it is joint work, we should do it in a spirit of compromise. The programme of work should be able to accommodate the interests of both nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States.

Nuclear disarmament, a fissile material cut-off treaty, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space should be addressed equally and appropriately and in a manner that is consistent with the Conference on Disarmament's mandates. If not all of us are yet ready for negotiation, we could all prepare the groundwork to pave the way for negotiation. Even if these are small steps, they are still important as long as we are moving in the right direction. Let us work actively and genuinely towards an agreement on a common approach to find common ground and overcome difficulties.

The President: I thank the delegate of Indonesia for his statement and I now give the floor to the delegate of Turkey.

Mr. Aslanargun (Turkey) (*via video link*): It is regrettable that the Conference on Disarmament, the only multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, has been at a deadlock for over two decades. Turkey attaches the utmost importance to the arms control and disarmament architecture.

In this regard, our first priority is to maintain this invaluable forum as an effective and functioning platform and to bring it back to its substantive work within the framework of its rules of procedure. We should avoid well-known differences and non-consensual matters. Focusing on common denominators and major issues on which we are more likely to reach consensus would better serve the proper functioning of the Conference.

We hope that an atmosphere of compromise and flexibility can be reached by all stakeholders on matters that have direct relevance to global disarmament efforts and that a programme of work can, accordingly, be adopted in the coming years.

Some countries have mentioned that it is important for the Conference to review its membership, including with a view to enlargement, as written in document CD/2197. To be clear, Turkey is not against enlargement. We played a constructive role during the last expansion of the membership. However, we still have concerns about the timing of another expansion. We have adopted a frank and open approach in this regard. We are of the opinion that the stalemate that we are living through has not been created by the procedures, membership issues or international dynamics of the Conference.

The Conference was created with a unique mandate and limited membership for a good reason. In its present format, it has produced successful treaties in the past. From this perspective, Turkey is convinced that the Conference on Disarmament possesses the mandate, rules of procedure and membership to discharge its duties. We believe that there is an urgent need for strong political will in order for it to resume its fundamental task, which is to negotiate legally binding international treaties.

The President: I thank the delegate of Turkey for his intervention. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I see the delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Díaz Mendoza (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela): Thank you, Madam President. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela appreciates the efforts made by the President of the Conference on Disarmament to keep the work of this body alive.

My delegation associates itself with the comments and views conveyed to the President by the delegation of Malaysia on behalf of the Group of 21 and with the statement read out, in the informal and formal plenaries, regarding the format of this meeting for the discussion of a separate document. As we have moved to a formal plenary meeting, my delegation would like to put its views on the record and repeat the statement made this morning during the informal consultations.

My delegation believes that the fact that this document is being discussed in a formal plenary meeting does not imply that delegations accord it status; this discussion should not be considered a precedent, either. We believe that the work of the Conference has been considerably diminished by turning it into a deliberative body and devoting human and financial resources to discussing documents that have not been submitted to the Conference for consideration and that the membership has not reached consensus on, since they reflect the contributions and views of only one presidency of the 2020 session.

We take note of document CD/2197, entitled “Summary of consultations during Australia’s presidency”. We appreciate the efforts made by Australia during its presidency; despite the difficult situation caused by the COVID pandemic, it managed to hold consultations. We would like to stress that, in our delegation’s view, this document is a working paper that was prepared and submitted by a single delegation and that contains the views of one of the six presidencies of the 2020 session.

Substantive negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament have been at a standstill for more than 20 years. In recent years, the Conference has been left hamstrung by the collapse and ineffective renegotiation of major international security, disarmament and arms control agreements, including some of the most critical bilateral international peace and security treaties. Despite the risks, the Conference has been unable to move forward with its mandate.

In my delegation’s view, the summary presented by Australia paints a deeply pessimistic picture of the future of the Conference. The paper by the Australian presidency, which emphasizes the lack of consensus on the question of whether the Conference’s programme of work should include a negotiating mandate and the divergence of views on the scope and objective of a fissile material cut-off treaty, does not reflect the desire and need expressed by some delegations to begin prompt negotiations of, for example, a legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and on negative security assurances.

We do not share the view that efforts to make progress in the negotiation of the four core issues on the Conference’s agenda – namely, cessation of the arms race, prevention of nuclear war, prevention of an arms race in outer space and negative security assurances – are a lost cause. The paper recommends that the Conference could engage in work on codes of conduct and plans of action, which are non-binding documents, but the fact that the Conference has the authority to negotiate does not mean that it should do so. In our view, this approach mainly favours the doctrines of countries that weaken the current arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regime, and departs from the Conference’s mandate to negotiate legally binding instruments.

One might wonder what the role of the Conference is in a situation where its member States seem to be abandoning any effort to pursue binding disarmament regulation. Which member States of the Conference would benefit if the bounds of its core mandate were brought closer in or that mandate was neglected?

Venezuela believes that weakening the Conference’s mandate would simply facilitate tolerance of the status quo and strengthen doctrines of deterrence based on a renewed arms race. Venezuela shares a multilateralist vision of international security. It believes that peace can be achieved by strengthening the international security, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regime. Constructive dialogue and the political will of the member States of the Conference are crucial for repairing the damage that has been done to the international disarmament regime. Against this backdrop, the Conference will have to devote enormous efforts in 2022 to breaking its historical stalemate, which has been aggravated by the uncertainty caused by COVID-19.

The Conference remains the only forum with a multilateral mandate to negotiate legally binding instruments on disarmament. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for her statement and I note that the Ambassador of the United States of America has asked for the floor again, but I would just note that we are at the end of our time for this morning. Please, Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President. I will be very brief. I want to thank you for convening this plenary session. I think it was important to hold it so that we could begin a discussion on how we can improve the functioning of the Conference. I certainly wish more countries had taken the floor to put their positions on the record because I believe that, until we seriously debate the body's working methods, we will remain in a stalemate. Nothing will change. My delegation will continue to push this issue because we believe it is critical to the functioning of this body. So I view today's discussion as the beginning, certainly not the end, of this fundamental debate.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his intervention. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? It seems not.

So, colleagues, this concludes our business for today. I would like to thank you all for your engagement in our discussion this morning.

The secretariat will be in touch regarding the timing and logistical arrangements for our next meeting, which will take place on Thursday, 12 August, International Youth Day. At that meeting, we will hear remarks from Ms. Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and from the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, as well as presentations from the United Nations Youth Champions for Disarmament. Conference on Disarmament members will then be invited to discuss the substantive issues raised by the youth champions and speak of their own initiatives involving youth or disarmament education, or any item they deem relevant to the topic.

Please be reminded that States that wish to accredit a youth representative to their delegation for the purpose of speaking to the Conference on Disarmament should send a note verbale to this effect to the Conference secretariat no later than close of business on Wednesday.

Thank you all, and thank you also to the interpreters and secretariat for their support.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.