

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand three hundred and thirty-sixth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 10 February 2015, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Mr. Jorge Lomónaco(Mexico)

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The President: I call to order the 1336th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Before we engage in what have been announced as the subjects for today, I would like to draw your attention to a request which the secretariat has received from the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), Ambassador István Gyarmati, to address the Conference during our plenary meeting tomorrow, 11 February 2015. As you will recall, two weeks ago the Ambassador of Switzerland informed the Conference of the operational problems which UNIDIR has been experiencing. I believe it would be useful for the Conference to allocate some time to this issue during our interactive debate tomorrow. If I hear no objection, I will instruct the secretariat to inform Ambassador Gyarmati of our readiness to listen to him tomorrow morning.

It was so decided.

The President: I would like our meeting to address two issues. First, I would like to continue our efforts to adopt a decision regarding civil society participation at the Conference. After doing so, I would like us to further discuss other issues pertaining to the Conference's rules of procedure.

Regarding civil society participation in the Conference, you might recall that last Wednesday we had a very constructive exchange of views on the proposal which I had tabled and which is contained in document CD/WP.585. I listened to all your views and comments on the draft, many of which prompted me to undertake further consultations and to seek clarifications from a number of delegations on the observations offered. This led to a drastic revision of the proposal in order to reflect everyone's concerns as much as possible. That draft, which was circulated to you last Thursday, is now before you as document CD/WP.585/Rev.1. My intention this morning is to have an exchange of views on this new proposal and, if possible, move to its adoption.

Before I open the floor on this subject, allow me to stress the following. The previous draft was conceived on the assumption that using previously agreed language, drawing on nothing less than the Conference's rules of procedure themselves, would defuse resistance. It did not quite work like that, as concerns arose on both sides of the aisle, if I may use the expression, on the question of civil society participation. This new draft is more conservative than the initial one, which was more ambitious regarding the role that civil society might play in the Conference. Needless to say, I would favour — as would some of you — a much more liberal approach with greater openness and transparency for civil society participation. However, I am willing to make concessions in order to secure the draft's adoption. I hope that one side of the aisle is as willing to compromise as the other. The more conservative character of the new draft is in line with the practice of other United Nations forums.

With these few remarks, I now open the floor for those delegations that would like to offer their views on the draft proposal contained in document CD/WP.585/Rev.1.

The representative of Belarus has the floor.

Mr. Grinevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, thank you for presenting the revised draft decision of the Conference on the participation of civil society representatives. We have two questions.

The first relates to the first operative paragraph on the participation of representatives of civil society in the work of the Conference. You have put forward wording clarifying what organizations represent civil society, and the wording is given in a reference at the bottom of the page. In this respect we should like to pose the following question: Are you simply proposing that members of the public should be permitted to

attend the Conference so that they can take places in the gallery and observe the meeting's work, or are we talking about representatives of non-governmental organizations who can make an actual contribution to the Conference's work, especially during negotiations or consultations, and can submit expert proposals or assessments? This is a crucial question. If anyone wishing to attend has access to the Conference, that could pose problems not only for us within the context of the Conference, but also for the security service. If such is the case, we will have to face security problems if naked women suddenly begin pelting us with some substance such as mayonnaise from the visitors' gallery. It would thus maybe be a good idea to elaborate a bit more on the content of the decision.

Secondly, about the last operative paragraph, we would like to hear some clarification. At one of the meetings held under your chairmanship within the framework of the Convention, you indicated that the task of the Conference on Disarmament was to hold negotiations, while the holding of discussions on agenda items was the task of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. This concluding paragraph is somewhat at odds with what you had previously indicated.

The President: I thank the representative of Belarus for his comments, but I have to say that I am at a bit of a loss about what your security concerns would be. Since they are already participating in the gallery above you, if they want to throw mayonnaise at you, they can do it now. They could do that now without our adopting this decision. So, I am a bit lost as to what your concerns about security would be.

As for the general public, no. The draft clearly states "civil society representatives". As you know, when you pass through the security gates at the Palais, the general public cannot enter without a proper badge. That distinguishes the general public from other persons who can have access to the Palais as such. I do not agree with you that listening to civil society would contradict the objective and purpose of the Conference's mandate to negotiate, because I am convinced — maybe you are not — that their input could be extremely useful for negotiations. Listening to them not only would not impede negotiations but it would rather be a great and very useful input for negotiations. You mentioned that maybe we need some language. Are you willing to propose some language that would ease your concerns?

Mr. Grinevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): At a previous meeting, our delegation drew attention to the fact that it welcomed the contribution of non-governmental organizations dealing with the issues on the Conference's agenda. It would perhaps be a good idea to specify that in this case we are talking about organizations specializing in international security issues, arms control and disarmament. Then everything would be clear. When preparing for this plenary meeting, I had a look at specialized websites of the United Nations. They list up to 300,000 organizations representing civil society. If we use the wording "civil society organizations" in the draft decision, it will be very difficult for the secretariat even to provide enough space for all the representatives. Even if just 3,000 representatives, and not 300,000, came, it would be rather hard to accommodate them. The Conference would probably have to move to another hall. When adopting decisions, the Conference must be guided by practical considerations and must act responsibly. All the details related to organizational aspects must be thoroughly thought through, including how representatives of civil society would in fact take part in the Conference's work.

The President: I thank you for your contribution. We might need to get back to your points, but let me just say that I see two persons sitting in the gallery: I do not see 300,000. There is a bit of a difference. If we were to have 300,000 applications, then we would have to review whatever we decide today. I am not inclined, however, to make any decision on the assumption that the Conference might be flooded with thousands and thousands of civil society participants. Let us see what others think about it.

The Ambassador of the United States of America has requested the floor.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Let me just say that the United States maintains an intensive and broad dialogue with civil society in the full spectrum of disarmament activities and that we value the contributions that civil society representatives make to our national policy deliberations and formulation. In considering proposals such as the one in document CD/WP.585/Rev.1, we bear in mind the various options and opportunities for civil society engagement against the backdrop of the Conference on Disarmament's core mandate as a negotiating body of member States. As we review this proposal, we have a number of questions related to what is envisioned in practical terms. If you would bear with me, I have several.

First, with regard to operative paragraph 1, could you define what is meant by a Conference meeting being designated as "closed"? The Conference's rules of procedure speak of plenary, public, private, informal and subsidiary body meetings, but not of closed meetings per se. Rule 20 states that plenary "meetings shall be held in public unless the Conference decides otherwise". The rules of procedure do not stipulate whether informal and/or subsidiary body meetings are public or private. However, rule 35 notes that the Conference "may also decide to invite" observer States to "participate in informal meetings and in meetings of its subsidiary bodies". In traditional Conference practice, this has been interpreted to mean that informal and/or subsidiary body meetings are private — not open to observer States or the public unless the Conference decides otherwise in a given case. Thus, depending on how one interprets what is meant by a meeting being designated as closed, one could intend to apply current Conference practice or, alternatively, one might intend that civil society representatives, unlike observer States, would be permitted to attend any meeting that the Conference had not expressly designated as closed.

My second question, also with regard to operative paragraph 1, is what is actually meant by "attend"? Does this mean that civil society representatives are invited to simply observe and listen, or does it intend for them to have the prerogative to speak, or at least to request to speak? Operative paragraph 2 suggests that some specific plenary meetings would be reserved for NGOs to "address" the Conference. Does this mean that civil society representatives would be invited to speak only during those especially allocated plenaries and, if so, would this include rights of reply?

My third question, again with regard to operative paragraph 1, is what is meant by the "designated area" for seating of civil society representatives? Currently, as we all know, civil society representatives attending public meetings of the Conference sit in the gallery without nameplates or microphones. Does the draft proposal envision something other than this? If the intent is to provide reserved seating on the plenary floor, would such seating be with nameplates and/or with microphones? Would the Conference chamber have adequate capacity to accommodate civil society representatives, along with member State and observer State delegations on the plenary floor?

My last question — I will make this one brief — is with regard to operative paragraph 2. How is operative paragraph 2 to be understood in relation to operative paragraph 1? Is it intended to mean that these reserved sessions would be the only time when NGO representatives would be invited to speak? And, quickly, let me come in on footnote 1, what is meant by "approval of the Conference of the list of civil society organizations"? Is this intended to suggest that requests from all civil society representatives be treated as a single package for a decision?

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States for his questions. Let me go one by one.

Indeed, the rules of procedure establish that there are public meetings, so the term “closed” is meant to mean the opposite of “public”. Whenever the Conference decides not to have a public meeting, civil society will then not be in attendance.

As to the speaking rights referred to in your last question, I think you answered your own question. The proposal indeed means that there would be a specially designated session for civil society to speak, meaning that they will not be speaking during their attendance at the other sessions. They will be in attendance but they will not be speaking. They will be listening. By rights of reply, I assume that you would assume that, whenever civil society speaks, members would be entitled to respond to whatever has been said at such a session.

As to reserved seating, the answer is yes. The whole purpose of this exercise is to bring them down from the gallery to the actual meeting room. The idea of having reserved space means that members must have a reserved space, observers — States not members, to use the proper term — have a reserved space and civil society representatives must also have one. I would not see the point in discussing civil society participation if we do not allow them to be present in this room by confining them to the upper gallery. That is the whole purpose. If you do not believe that they should sit in this room, then I do not see the point in discussing civil society participation, to be completely frank and honest.

With regard to the list of requests, that applies, you will recall, to States that are not members of the Conference. The secretariat receives individual requests. If we receive several requests, we consider them as a package, as at the beginning of this year’s session when we received 10 or 12 — we read out the list of the 10 or 12 States that wished to participate. If there is no objection, they are invited to come down to the room. The idea would be to follow that same procedure with civil society, which in turn will probably raise the question of space. If at some point the Conference becomes so successful that we have lines and lines of civil society representatives, we might decide that we cannot accept any more after those that have been accepted. These provisions are intended to address precisely the question of pertinence of civil society participation, which goes back to the point made by Belarus. In the end, the Conference will have the possibility of denying or objecting to the participation of civil society representatives on the basis of relevance or pertinence or, if you like, at some point in the future which I do not see, of space.

I hope that I have answered your questions, Ambassador.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you for some of the clarifications. I will feed them back to my capital.

The President: I recognize the Ambassador of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I can only agree with the comments — and they were indeed comments — that were made in this room both during today’s meeting and at previous ones. Some of these remarks seemingly have no direct relation with the draft, but they are directly related to the way this question is considered.

To the best of my recollection, at the last meeting, one of the delegations proposed waiting to see the results of the informal Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum, and only then to resume consideration of this question. But there is more to it than that.

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of non-governmental organizations have so far been associated with a given nation or a country. The common denominator has been the national interest, which in this body is represented by the delegations of the States taking part in the Conference. The question thus arises as to whether the opinion of a given NGO reflects the national interest of a State, and whether that opinion is fully incorporated in the national position and is expressed by the relevant delegation. If not, then we are setting a time bomb for an occasion when a national NGO will come here and express an opinion

differing from that of the delegation of the State where the NGO operates or is registered. The Russian Federation carries out active work with civil society and specifically takes into account this common denominator, which exists, so that it can reflect the opinions of all, and not just of a single organization.

The decision we are taking is irreversible. Of course, we could have agreed not only to the attendance but also to the participation of NGOs at this stage, when the Conference is pressing ahead with its efforts to find a way out of the current complex situation, which has now lasted 18 years. However, when we come to negotiate, the situation will radically change. Then, the unique nature of the Conference as an international forum for negotiations on the extremely sensitive questions of national security will have to come to the fore. I therefore ask you all: is it even appropriate for NGOs to attend? As we all know, negotiations prosper in more private settings.

Furthermore, as you know, we have already invited experts in various fields to informal consultations. To do so, we needed nothing more than one-off decisions, and the experts in those fields had the opportunity to bring their points of view directly to the attention of the Conference. So in this sense, as far as professional expert opinions outside of the framework of the Conference are concerned, there are no obstacles at all. No additional decisions are required.

Coming back to the national identity of non-governmental organizations, and all the more so of civil society: civil society, by definition, cannot be international. None other than the delegation of Mexico has provided us with a good example that can be followed by other delegations actively seeking to give non-governmental organizations access to the Conference. By all means, take the example of Mexico. Include NGO representatives in the official delegation, give them the floor and let them speak on behalf of your delegation, and more precisely your Government, if you consider that their opinions coincide with the basic security interests of the State. No one is prohibiting that from happening, and no additional decisions are needed.

In concrete terms, about the draft: the proposed draft decision gives non-governmental organizations a de facto higher status than the status accorded by the rules of procedure to specialized international organizations and disarmament and non-proliferation organizations, which, incidentally, are inter-State bodies. How will this be taken into consideration? How will it be perceived? As downright unfair. Such organizations hold higher expert potential. Those who would like to argue about this may do so. We should discuss this question.

There is something else that escapes me. For the previous decision, when the representative of Mexico said that it was an absolutely separate decision, that could be agreed. And now what are we invoking? The rules of procedure, referring specifically to rule 42. Already at the time, we tried to specify how that decision related to the status or to the modalities set forth in the rules of procedure. In the linkage, I see a direct intention to revisit rule 42, which, notwithstanding whatever anyone might say to convince me otherwise, naturally cannot remain in its previous form.

Our delegation is also grappling with another question, which is not new: why has a major and fundamental part of the decision setting out the rules of procedure for access to the Conference by non-governmental organizations been placed in a footnote? It is an essential part of the decision. And that is without even mentioning that other delegations have raised entirely justified and correct questions about how we will set up filters and take decisions. For all the talk of filters and decisions, the proposed draft right from the start contains no qualifiers or criteria to vet out non-governmental organizations having no connection with disarmament, such as human rights and humanitarian organizations. One of us, for instance, has brought up an organization having no connection with disarmament or

policy, but one that is extremely active: Femen, an organization whose activities are no more than an affront to normal people.

In the final analysis, all this complicates our work, and specifically makes our priority — the task of finding a way out of an 18-year deadlock and agreeing on a programme of work — more complex. While at first we fully endorsed the efforts of the Mexican presidency aimed at agreeing on a programme of work, to my mind, the idea of involving NGOs rather distracts from our joint efforts to find solutions to the root problems behind this impasse, and does not help to resolve them. We already have a variety of opinions that is more than enough to shake things up and divide the Conference.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Russia for his comments. Let me address his points one by one.

On the question of relevance or pertinence of NGO participation, the footnote to which you referred is precisely to address that. If a civil society organization is not relevant to the work and discussions of this body, the footnote is meant to address that by not accepting its participation. Rule 42 is about communications, not about participation: those are completely different matters. There is no attempt being made to amend it. There is a paragraph to recognize that there might be certain provisions that are relevant to NGOs, but the paragraph says, and I read out, “notwithstanding”. That means that it is in spite of the fact, but not meant to amend that provision, that the following paragraph applies. That paragraph was added at your request because you had questioned how we could have a self-standing decision without any reference to the rules of procedure. There it is, in response to your question and your concern.

As to NGOs, the term means “non-governmental organizations” — by definition, these are organizations that may or may not share the same view of the Government of the country where they are located. Most of these organizations, by the way, are not national organizations but are international organizations. They do not belong to any particular country. Even if they are from a particular country, their objective is not to share the view of the Government. That is precisely why we want them here, unless you do not think that having a view different from that of the Government is welcome. I do believe it is welcome. I believe that it enriches our discussions, that having a different view is the whole purpose of having civil society participating in this body or in other forums. That is the whole purpose of civil society: not to share the same view as Governments but to bring in other views. It is true that we tried. We included a member of civil society in our delegation, but that was because that person could not participate otherwise. He is not meant to have an aligned position with the Government — quite the opposite. He is meant to give us his views which might differ and give a different perspective. That is the richness of civil society. That is why I am convinced that this body needs civil society participation. What is the difference vis-à-vis the current status? What would the difference be? It is that they would not have to sit on the margins of this room and that we could listen to them in designated sessions. It would mean a difference and we would have to listen to them, which I believe would be enriching.

Going to the overall concerns, I would submit that the status quo is not working and has not worked for 18 years. Sticking to the status quo might thus not be the solution to getting out of the stalemate. Maybe one way to get out of the stalemate would be to change the status quo, to see things differently and to try other things. I believe that civil society participation might contribute to that. You might disagree but I am convinced that civil society participation can actually help us to get out of the stalemate. The counter-argument is 18 years of paralysis. The status quo is strong evidence that the Conference is not working and has not worked for 18 years. So, why not give it a try? Why not try something differently? Why not do as we do in other forums? I will come back to that point later, if I may.

The Ambassador of Senegal has the floor.

Mr. Sene (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time I am taking the floor before this august assembly, I should like to express to all my readiness to work together and cooperate with everyone in a constructive spirit. I should also like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency. I have full faith in your ability to successfully carry out our work.

It is regrettable that the Conference on Disarmament is still unable to adopt a programme of work, notwithstanding the efforts made under the successive presidencies, including your own, with the draft that you were kind enough to submit for our consideration.

To return to the current debate, we should like to make our modest contribution as Sahelians: we have had two changes of government with the help of civil society. Senegal has changed President twice in peace, calm and stability, and it is civil society that provided the extraordinary and impressive support that made this possible.

Furthermore, our country is located in a region, the Sahel, that is today overrun with weapons of all kinds: heavily destructive weapons and weapons that have escaped State control, which is why they have proliferated. Today, civil society plays a role as a warning and watch system, an advisory and support role that is significant and appreciated by our States in the Sahel. I should thus like, Mr. President, to express our delegation's support for your draft, all the more so as we find two elements reassuring: first, the requirement for prior authorization before any participation or before anyone takes the floor; and secondly, the acceptance of requirements for civil society and non-governmental organizations wishing to make a contribution. It is my understanding that before filing a request, an organization must provide evidence for its request to be accepted. But once a request is accepted, our delegation believes that the authorization to contribute should not pose any serious problems.

Now there is also this meeting scheduled to take place on 19 March between the Conference on Disarmament and civil society. We believe the outcome of this event will help us to take a sound decision based on consensus, with factors advanced by the two sides and an element of consensus. We believe that after 18 years of deadlock, we cannot continue to feed the same fears and be hampered by the same problems with regard to civil society participation. We believe civil society participation can in any case only help to find a solution. Now I know that disarmament is an extremely sensitive topic and that it covers highly complex questions and security issues. It thus may well be that leaving it for States alone to resolve this problem would be a source of difficulty. But if we open the door to civil society, that might help to find a solution, as you yourself have so eloquently said, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Senegal for his comments and in particular for his support. Let me take this opportunity to state that some of you have made, or tried to make, a link between this draft decision and the civil society forum that will take place in March. These are two completely different matters. They both involve civil society but there is no linkage between the two. This is about civil society participation in our discussions, in this very room, in the plenary of the Conference. The forum is organized by the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament — more specifically, the Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva in his personal capacity — to discuss issues pertaining to disarmament, but it has nothing to do with civil society participation in this room. That is a civil society forum, outside of this room, which we also welcome. I would encourage you to make the distinction between the two issues at hand.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Sano (Japan): As Japan has been strengthening its relationship with civil society and attaches great importance to the involvement of civil society in disarmament, especially in the context of disarmament and non-proliferation education, we appreciate your efforts to find a way to increase the participation of civil society in the Conference on Disarmament.

We see your proposal on civil society participation as a positive step that has motivated a constructive discussion in the Conference. There are some clarifications or improvements needed, but we can essentially consider the revised draft positively. At the same time, we have heard various opinions from several member States: it will be necessary to discuss these issues in a concrete manner. For example, it would be useful for us to further discuss, in a comprehensive way, how NGOs might be involved in the context of reviewing our working methods, including the rules of procedure. In this regard, you may recall that last July the Conference President at the time, the Kenyan Ambassador, proposed the establishment of an informal working group on the working methods of the Conference without prejudice to rule 18, regarding the consensus rule. He requested the Coordinators of the regional groups at that time to study his proposal in the respective groups and come up with a view.

Mr. President, you may be presenting a proposal in this session but, as an idea, we may wish to consider establishing this informal working group and take up the issue of civil society as part of the review of the working methods.

Lastly, we welcome the civil society forum to be held on 19 March. We might also think of how to enhance civil society participation in the Conference based on the results of this forum.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his comments. Allow me to share some thoughts with you. First, you read my mind: the second part of today's session will be about working methods and we will get to that later this morning.

On the question of the forum, I insist on the importance of making a distinction. The forum will not be discussing civil society participation in the Conference. It will be discussing issues of substance. I therefore really do not see the need to wait for the civil society forum to try to learn whether there is a need for, or any usefulness in, opening the door to civil society participation. I really do not see the linkage, as the question of civil society participation in the Conference will not be the subject of the discussions — it will be the substance of it.

I now give the floor to the representative of France.

Mr. Riquet (France) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I do not intend to take the floor for very long. I simply wish to say that in general terms France obviously is strongly supportive of anything that helps to strengthen and breathe life into relations between the authorities and civil society. This kind of interaction, this synergy, makes it possible for them to act in complementarity, which may enlighten our work. This is true at the national level, but also multilaterally, on the international scene, including for disarmament. That is, incidentally, why we have supported the idea of the civil society forum to be held on 19 March. We have also emphasized the importance of this event's inclusiveness and diversity so as to allow all points of view to be expressed. I believe specifically that it is desirable for all kinds of participants from civil society to be represented. Of course this includes non-governmental organizations, but it also means academia, think tanks and, if necessary, the private sector, for instance. I think a distinction really must be made between civil society and non-governmental organizations. This means for instance that we may bring in eminent individuals who are not necessarily associated with a given organization or specific institutions. I am thinking in particular of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament

Research (UNIDIR). I would like to thank you for suggesting at the beginning of this meeting that we might hear out Ambassador Gyarmati on this subject.

It goes without saying, then, that France strongly supports bringing civil society in the broad sense into our deliberations and the general idea of setting up a space for dialogue and shared discussion. However, I believe this calls for some consideration, taking into account the specificities of this chamber. I noted, Mr. President, that at the beginning of this meeting you said that the text you were putting forward was in line with the general practice at international bodies. This is true, but I think we must bear in mind the specific nature of this body, the Conference on Disarmament, which is above all an intergovernmental negotiating body. We must not create a situation where the association of civil society would interfere with the mandate, which, incidentally and rather unfortunately, we have had serious problems fulfilling for 19 years now.

As for the draft, several questions can be raised. Various speakers have already addressed them. We specifically had a question about the wording. While the text is in English, and we have yet to see the French, the use of the word “to attend” raises the question of what is meant by attendance, and specifically whether it means being present or taking part in discussions.

We also have a question about a difference we note in the wording of the first and second operative paragraphs. While the former refers to representatives of civil society, the latter refers to non-governmental organizations, or NGOs. Are the two terms intended to mean the same group? If so, why not use the same wording? Would this mean there is a difference in substance or wording between the two paragraphs?

There is another point, concerning the footnotes, which has already been raised by some delegations. From our perspective, these footnotes, which are indeed quite useful, include some very important procedural elements, specifically those setting out how representatives of civil society are to put forward requests for participation and how they are to be approved. Such elements are usually incorporated in the body of the text, not the footnotes. Is there a particular reason for them to be included in the footnotes? As the rest of the questions have been raised by other delegations, I will stop there.

The President: I thank the representative of France for his comments. Let me respond to each one of them.

As always, versions of this draft decision are available in other languages. I have here in front of me the French version. In English it says “attend”, in French it says “*assister*”. I hope that clarifies the issue.

The use of the term “non-governmental organizations” in operative paragraph 2 is meant to be the same. The idea is to describe the kind of meeting that will take place. “Meetings with non-governmental organizations” means between members of the Conference and representatives of civil society.

As to the footnote — and as you know, footnotes have the same legal force as the text, so it makes no difference — it only helps to facilitate the reading of the decision. Instead of making it too complicated, we use a technique that we often use elsewhere to facilitate the reading of the text. However, it does not have any lesser status just because it is a footnote, as you all know as lawyers.

I now recognize the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Atta (Egypt): Allow me to begin, Mr. President, by expressing my appreciation for the efforts you are making, under your presidency, to give real impetus to the work of the Conference on Disarmament. My comment is along the lines of the observations made by the representative of France. It is about the variation in the terminology used in the

proposal between “non-governmental organizations” and “civil society”. Based on my modest understanding, I believe that the first term is broader in scope than the second one. Non-governmental organizations could be considered as part of civil society, but not the whole of civil society. That is why I think, for the sake of being precise, specific and well-defined, clear terminology should be used in the proposal in order to give a clear understanding for the member States.

The President: I thank the representative of Egypt for his constructive suggestion and maybe this would address the French concern on the term. Maybe we should be consistent with the term in both paragraphs. But, as you would agree, this is relatively minor as to the kind of discussions that are taking place here.

I recognize the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Masmejean (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, we would like to thank you for submitting to the Conference on Disarmament the draft decision on the participation of civil society in our work and its revised version, thus bringing us to consider a question that has been sidestepped for far too long.

The draft decision that you have circulated raises a number of questions and calls for just as many answers. First, there is a question of principle, as to whether the Conference on Disarmament should open up to greater participation by civil society. We have already set out our point of view on this subject, so I will be brief on this question.

In the past 15 years civil society has demonstrated the added value that it can contribute to discussions in many disarmament processes, and this contribution has become a constant in many circles. We fully share your view that in order to go beyond the status quo at the Conference, we must also take a good look at how we operate and include participants from outside, with whom we should begin a dialogue within this body. We also thank you for your clarification, which we endorse, about the multinational nature and role of NGOs.

The second question is which members of civil society should take part in our work. We believe the participation of civil society should not be more complicated than necessary. At the same time, we subscribe to the argument, raised earlier this morning, that the members of civil society must bring added value to our work, and thus have some competence in our fields of endeavour. We also understand the argument that the Conference on Disarmament deals with sometimes sensitive topics and cannot be open to just anyone. In this regard, we believe the approach suggested in the revised version of the draft decision, according to which members of civil society wishing to take part in our work must say so beforehand or at the beginning of an annual session and the list should be validated by the Conference, meets the dual objective of keeping things simple and at the same time selective.

Lastly, there is the question of “who” takes part. This point has been raised this morning. As we are starting to consider which members of civil society should be given the opportunity to take part in our work, it would probably be appropriate also to begin similar deliberations about the participation of international organizations in the sessions of the Conference.

The third question relates to the parameters for the participation of civil society representatives. Clearly, NGOs should be able to receive the official documentation of the Conference and to submit written material. In practice, they already have this right in general terms, by virtue of the decision adopted by the Conference at its 946th plenary meeting, in 2004, which included a decision on the participation of civil society. We believe that making the Conference’s interaction with civil society a regular practice, as

suggested in the revised draft decision, is the least that can be done to consolidate NGO participation in our work.

We think it is just as important to allow for targeted interaction, which is to say to allow representatives of civil society to take part in discussions when we take up specific subjects on the agenda and when they have valuable expertise on the subjects at hand. In such cases, a procedure could be foreseen whereby the President would submit for the Conference's approval authorization for civil society representatives to take the floor. However, if the parameters figuring in the decision now on the table are accepted by the Conference on Disarmament, we would of course support the decision.

Our last point has to do with how the participation of civil society is regulated in the Conference's work. Obviously, we do not oppose amending the rules of procedure if that is what is required. However, we note that the participation of civil society in the Conference's work has evolved over time, and this has been based solely on decisions taken by the Conference, not amendments of the rules of procedure. The main decision of the Conference relating to such participation was taken by this body, as I have said, at its 946th plenary meeting, in February 2004. In 2010, too, the Conference adopted a decision, allowing the NGO Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to address the Conference on Disarmament once a year directly instead of doing so through its Secretary-General. This method, through the simple adoption of decisions, should apparently be given priority.

The President: I thank the representative of Switzerland for his comments. I indeed share your view that it would be desirable to have even greater participation of civil society than what is being proposed in this draft. However, I believe that a compromise might have better possibilities of success as opposed to a more ambitious approach. As I said at the outset of this meeting, I am presenting something below my own desires and expectations in the hope that the other side of the aisle will compromise and will meet with those who would like to see a greater participation.

On the question of international organizations, you are right as well. The problem is a little more complex than that. Each President has only four weeks in which to do his or her work and this is something that we should be reflecting on; it is something that I will leave behind as a reflection on my experience. Four weeks is not enough to make a meaningful contribution but rather to try a little bit. I have thus had to pick my battles and I picked civil society for reasons of consistency and of belief. If there were more time, the question of international organizations should also be addressed.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van der Kwast (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts so far. With regard to this draft, the Netherlands is, in general, always in favour of civil society. We have to see, however, where this has great added value — we think that expertise, as has been said by others, is an essential element. Therefore, we would not like to have a general contribution but rather, in particular, wide expertise. In that sense, we also think, as has been said by our colleague from Switzerland, that the participation of international organizations can be of value. The rules of participation are essential and, although we see that you make a clear difference between the meeting of 19 March 2015 and this meeting — we will, by the way, contribute to the meeting on 19 March — we think we need a very clear understanding, particularly of the two footnotes. On the first one, I think that there are still some questions: does this mean that the approval of the Conference will be for one year? Is that the rule? That is one thing. The second thing refers to written material: what is the status of written material submitted through this procedure to the Conference? Is it an official document? Does it have some other value? Those are questions we need to take a

close look at, because I think there is a clear difference between what States are bringing in and what NGOs are bringing in.

Finally, while we do value your efforts in support of NGO and civil society participation, we hope that we will also look — under this ambitious presidency — into the question of the extension of membership, because we think there are also very fundamental questions there and, as we have said repeatedly in this body, we think that needs to be addressed.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his remarks. On the last question, I am looking forward to listening to you tomorrow in the session that we have allocated for an interactive debate on expansion of the Conference. If you have been following what I have been trying to do, I have picked my battles: one is civil society participation; the second — the Japanese Ambassador foresaw the future — is about working methods; and the third one is about expansion of the Conference. Those are the three topics that will be before you. I am looking forward to your contribution tomorrow to see whether we can make some progress on expansion.

With regard to civil society participation, one of your two questions was about the meaning of the footnote. The footnote is pretty clear, because it says that requests should be made two weeks before the commencement of the first part of the annual session. That means that requests have to be made for every annual session. This is in line with the practice used for States that are not members of the Conference. Last week, some of you voiced concern about why we would give a higher ranking to civil society than to non-members of the Conference. That is one of the reasons why I produced a different draft that would prevent that from happening, as some of you consider it unacceptable that civil society would have a higher rank than non-member States. We would now be submitting civil society to the same process as non-member States, which means that every year they would have to make the request two weeks in advance to participate.

On the question of the treatment of communications from civil society, I will ask the Secretary to respond to that.

Mr. Fung (Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): Mr. President, the secretariat indeed receives communications from civil society. You will recall that, under the rules of procedure, we receive communications from civil society. There are also times when civil society representatives simply place their documents at the entrance of the room, as you have surely seen. Basically, that is the situation. Rule 42 of the rules of procedure indicates how communications from civil society should be handled.

The President: I thank the secretariat for that information. I now recognize the representative of India.

Mr. Nath (India): My delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for circulating the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.585/Rev.1. We have carefully listened to the discussion today and also during the last plenary. My delegation has been of the view that, while the Conference on Disarmament is a member State-driven body, there is space for interaction with NGOs, academic institutions and research bodies. We value the input provided by NGOs, academic and research institutions on disarmament issues. We have also welcomed the organization of the Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum by the Acting Secretary-General.

We would assess any proposals to enhance interaction with civil society within the framework of the rules of procedure and consideration of how best the Conference could benefit from the perspectives of NGOs, and this is not restricted just to Geneva-based NGOs. Many delegations have pointed out that the proposal contained in the draft decision represents, in effect, a modification of the Conference's rules of procedure. We also pointed

out that greater clarity is needed on a number of aspects of the draft decision, including modalities and criteria for participation, and the special meeting that is envisaged and how reporting on that would be. These were some of the questions that my capital had.

We are not against the decision on the issue of interaction with civil society — this is indeed a very important subject. However, we do share the view that this proposal needs greater consideration and discussion within the Conference. We also look forward to assessing the experience of the Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum to be held on 19 March before taking a decision on the subject. We have heard, Mr. President, your view that there is no linkage between these two events, but we do believe that the 19 March event would have lessons for us as we take this issue forward.

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

Mr. Shen Jian (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, I would like first to thank you for putting forward a new revised draft on civil society participation in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. The new draft to a certain extent takes up the comments and recommendations expressed at the plenary discussion held on 4 February, it takes into account the realities of the Conference's work and it will help us to move forward towards a consensus.

China greatly values the efforts made and actions taken by civil society and non-governmental organizations over the years to advocate for international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. It supports a strengthened dialogue with non-governmental organizations, in an appropriate manner and format, of matters of mutual importance. The Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum will take place on 19 March, offering a very good opportunity for the representatives of the member States of the Conference and of civil society to engage in an exchange and dialogue. China is looking forward to the exchange of views on the questions at hand with all participants on this occasion.

China is aware that, as the President has now mentioned on numerous occasions, there is a difference between this forum and a decision on the participation of civil society in the work of the Conference. However, we believe that as the forum is essentially aimed at ensuring an exchange between the Conference and civil society, it is indeed somewhat related to the aim of the work of the Conference. The forum will serve as a reference on civil society participation in the Conference's work.

China believes that the Conference is a unique structure that covers, among other things, nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space and all the topics it takes up touch upon the military and security interests of all States.

Sovereign States bear primary responsibility for defending their fundamental security interests and must be the mainstay of the Conference's work. The rules of procedure of the Conference are clear about the means of participation of non-governmental organizations in the Conference's meetings and can serve as the main basis for their participation in the Conference's work.

The Chinese delegation has considered in detail the revised draft put forward by the President. We, like many colleagues preceding us, believe there are a number of questions that still require clarification, in particular how to define civil society.

We should like to know why there is a difference between the first operative paragraph, which mentions civil society, and the second, which refers to non-governmental organizations. Do we need to establish qualifications for civil society representatives wishing to apply to take part in the Conference's work, and if so, how do we draw them up? We believe civil society and non-member States are not of the same nature, and civil

society organizations have a relatively complex background. As mentioned in the footnotes to this document, two weeks may or may not be sufficient for member States to examine the relevant qualifications. This question perhaps requires some further consideration.

Moreover, there are other questions, for example about the specific form to be taken by civil society or non-governmental organizations attending meetings. Of course, the Chinese delegation has also taken note of the clarifications just presented by the President and will report them to our capital for consideration.

There is another question, that of whether the decision now before us is in conflict with the rules of procedure. We have heard a number of colleagues raise this question of the relationship between the rules of procedure and this decision.

These, then, are the questions we have about the new draft presented by the President. We would be happy to exchange views with anyone having related questions.

The President: I thank the representative of China for his remarks. As I said before, I do not believe that this proposal is in conflict whatsoever with the rules of procedure. I think it is carefully drafted so that it takes into account the fact that there are provisions pertaining to civil society in the rules of procedure but that these provisions are notwithstanding those provisions. So, there is no conflict. This is a very common legal technique to avoid a conflict and it is in the rules of procedure. So, I do not believe that there is any conflict with the rules of procedure.

As to the question of how to define “civil society”, the first footnote clearly establishes that the Conference — this very body — will define civil society by accepting, or not, a request for participation. There could not be a simpler method than that. It will be your decision to accept them, or not. That would be the definition, and in making that decision I suppose that you will consider whether these representatives are relevant or pertinent, or not.

Now, we keep talking about the civil society forum, so I will ask the secretariat to remind us what the civil society forum is, because we seem to be making some linkages and maybe there is some confusion as to the purpose and object of the civil society forum. After we have listened to the secretariat, I will ask you to see whether you honestly believe that the civil society forum will make any difference, if it will affect or modify your position on civil society participation. I believe it will not, because it is a different matter. That will of course be your call. Let us listen to the secretariat to see if you still honestly believe that your position on civil society participation depends on the outcome of that forum.

Mr. Fung (Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): In planning the civil society forum, Mr. President, the Acting Secretary-General was faced with a number of choices, including whether the forum should focus on substantive issues or should focus on procedural issues — methods of work issues — or on both. After lengthy reflection, he chose to focus on substantive issues, which means that the forum would be organized around the four core issues of the Conference and each core issue would have member States, experts and civil society experts exchanging views on that specific core issue. There would be four panels on the four core issues. At the end, there would be a wrap-up session that would allow the forum to take stock of what had been discussed. So, the forum is not on processes — that is, on how civil society could participate in the Conference — but rather the forum creates space for interaction between civil society and the Conference on the core issues that the Conference has been dealing with. The Acting Secretary-General views this as a first step in the establishment of a dialogue between civil society and the Conference on Disarmament. Again, it is not to tackle ways and means by which civil society could participate in the Conference, as you have been discussing this morning.

The President: I thank the secretariat for that clarification. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Italy.

Mr. Mati (Italy): Let me begin by thanking you, Mr. President, for your efforts to give new impetus to the activities of the Conference on Disarmament. We appreciate your commitment to resume the normative work of the Conference and, as I said in my previous intervention, our objective is to preserve the role of the Conference and to do our utmost to overcome its current deadlock.

In this respect, we welcome the initiative to promote discussion on the relationship between the Conference and civil society. As other member States and delegations have underlined, we cannot but reaffirm the importance that we attach to the strengthening of dialogue with all relevant actors of civil society and to their contribution to the activities of the Conference.

We strongly believe that the Conference would only benefit from greater interaction with civil society, of course under appropriate modalities. As I indicated before, this would enable the Conference to receive valuable external inputs and expertise and thereby advance its work.

In this vein, we welcome the initiative proposed by the Acting Secretary-General, Mr. Møller, to convene an informal Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum in March. We are perfectly aware of the difference between the two initiatives but we still look forward to that meeting and to having feedback on how appropriate it might be to organize it as a recurring event, as was the original idea of the Acting Secretary-General, in order to allow greater interaction between the Conference and civil society.

While it is true that there is no linkage between the two initiatives, I see interest among the representatives of civil society in contributing to this debate.

We share the view that the Conference should take a fresh look at this matter. We also see a need to be better aware of how civil society views the issues we are debating in this forum in order to assess its expectations and identify ideas that could assist us in our work. At the same time, it is equally important for us to allow civil society to participate and be better informed about our position and concerns.

In this respect, we appreciate your efforts to table a proposal on this issue and we have taken positive note of the new version of your proposal. In our view, it represents a step forward in relation to the previous one and offers a good basis for deepening our reflection and continuing our discussion on this very important subject, while clarifying and further discussing the points raised by many delegations.

I can assure you, Mr. President, that we will continue to support your efforts in this direction.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Italy. The following speakers have requested to take the floor and I would then like to close the list, if I may: Argentina, Iran, Sweden, Turkey, Algeria, South Africa, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Brazil. With that, we will close the list so that we can move to the next issue after I sum up this discussion.

I now recognize the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Cima (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I shall speak in Spanish, as I wish to ask you a question about the Spanish version of the text.

Allow me to begin by taking note that, on various occasions, you have said that you "pick your battles". I have only recently arrived in Geneva and have no desire to be the target of your battles, but I would like to request some clarification. I am looking at the

Spanish version of the document, which refers to allowing for “*una interacción mayor y más oficial*” (“greater and more official interaction”). We may come from the other side of the world and our Spanish may not be the best, but that wording does not sound right to me, Mr. President. I do not know what “more official” might mean. Does it mean that the interaction was previously a bit official, and now it will be a bit more official? I honestly do not know what the words “more official” mean here. I am simply asking, as a point of order, that we try to recast this paragraph slightly. The English is fine: “greater and more formal interaction”. The translation of the English word “formal” as “*oficial*” in Spanish is unclear to me, so I am asking you to make an effort so we can put forward a good text. Of course, I understand full well that this is not a question of substance.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of Argentina for his statement. I should like to offer a clarification. The President is not responsible for the translations and translation is not among the President’s responsibilities. But as you have said, the translation in question could be better. We shall make sure that the Spanish text reflects the original meaning.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the representative of Iran.

Mr. Heidari (Islamic Republic of Iran): Like others, I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for your paper and the revision. We have been listening very carefully to the interactive views expressed in this regard. However, as some of the questions that we have were not raised, I would like to raise them in order to perhaps enrich our discussion here of this paper.

One was touched on by the representative of Argentina regarding the word “formal” in the Spanish translation — English is not our mother tongue so far. In the chapeau paragraph, when you refer to the “greater and more formal interaction with civil society”, perhaps “formal interaction” requires clarification with regard to the extent. We would like and would expect from civil society their formal interaction.

The second question regards operative paragraph 1 and representatives of civil society. Is, as is our understanding, the letter of request from a civil society organization sufficient for examination of whether the organization is relevant or irrelevant and would be allowed to participate — or attend, as you put it in the paper — or do we need some kind of credential for civil society? Based on our participation in some other international forums, for example in the chemical safety sphere in which I have been participating so far, there are criteria for examining the credentials of civil society organizations in order to participate in or attend the kind of discussions that are held in those forums.

We have discussed the representation of civil society by comparing it with non-members, but it is quite clear that non-members are representatives of sovereign States: they are members of the United Nations with specific credentials. We are not yet clear about civil society representation based on just requesting a letter. I think it would be very difficult for the Conference, just on the basis of a letter, to examine the relevance or irrelevance of the activity of a civil society organization.

I would like you to further enlighten us on those issues.

The President: I thank the representative of Iran for his comment. I will respond to your specific question, which has also somewhat floated in the air throughout the debate, when I sum up this issue. I hope that I will make the clarification with a very strong argument on that. I now recognize the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Lindell (Sweden): I have no prepared remarks, Mr. President, and will be very brief. I wish to thank you for the revised version of the text and agree with you that it could

be said to be a relatively conservative or modest proposal. Sweden takes a basically and principally positive view towards civil society participation and would be prepared to support your proposal.

The President: I thank the representative of Sweden for his remarks. Now I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Ms. Kasnakli (Turkey): Many of the questions we had in mind have already been raised by other representatives and have been partly answered by you, Mr. President. I will thus not dwell on those issues. As a general remark, I might suggest that including an expression like “NGOs whose activities are relevant to the work of the Conference” in the text might solve many of the questions raised today. At the same time, we would be defining the sort of NGOs we expect to have here.

I would like to kindly ask, Mr. President, how you intend to proceed, but you are probably coming to that. Allow me to add that we are fully aware that the event which is going to take place on 19 March is a totally different arrangement at which core agenda items will be discussed. However, many statements have linked the events, in our mind, referring to the rules of procedure and to seeing how that forum might evolve and what conclusions we would reach and if we would like to amend the rules of procedure. We understand the clarification that you and the secretariat have made, but there have been statements linking these two events.

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

Mr. Khelif (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, the Algerian delegation would like to express its thanks to you for the efforts you have made and for the draft decision that you have submitted, which takes into account the preliminary views expressed during the previous plenary meeting.

As the Ambassador of Senegal has said, civil society plays an important and decisive watch and warning role in the situation that we face. Civil society is a driving force for our conscience, demonstrating the failures of States and their incapacity, in particular here in the Conference, to face up to challenges to international peace and security.

We believe that the Conference on Disarmament must not fall behind in the dynamics of civil society participation that can be seen in other bodies. Algeria is therefore in favour of a greater opening to civil society, so that it can make its contribution to our discussions in an appropriate manner, commensurate with its specific role.

However, as our colleague from Switzerland has said, we should not complicate these discussions. We have to be pragmatic and try to move on to the next step, a step above the status quo, where we have the current status of civil society participation, so as to hear out civil society and benefit from its point of view. We believe that going from one extreme to the other might undermine any initiative, however laudable it might be, to ensure more interaction with civil society.

We, too, would like some clarification. As a number of delegations have said, reference is made to a variety of concepts: sometimes it is “civil society” that is mentioned, but the notion of “civil society organizations” appears as well, as does the idea of “non-governmental organizations”, which is the term that appears in the Conference’s rules of procedure. As we know, the concept of civil society has no generally accepted definition, and we believe that according to the definition given by the European Union, non-governmental organizations are part of civil society. As our colleague from Turkey has said, it would perhaps be more pragmatic to focus on this concept, i.e., non-governmental organizations which play an active role in the fields addressed by the discussions on the Conference’s agenda.

Like the Ambassador of the United States of America, we too should like to ask about the meaning of “to attend the meetings of the Conference”. Does this mean that non-governmental organizations will be entitled to make statements on the same footing as States on matters on the agenda of plenary meetings? Paragraph 1 of the draft decision stipulates that representatives of civil society would be allowed to receive documents of the Conference. We would like to know what kind of documentation would be covered. Would this apply only to official documents that have already been published and that are already in the database of the Conference on Disarmament, or will they also have access to documentation such as conference room papers and working papers? If only public documents are covered, we do not see any reason to mention this, as such documentation will be made publicly available to the entire international community through the website of the Conference on Disarmament.

In the same paragraph, the last line states that civil society will be able to make available written contributions to the Conference participants. I do not know whether such contributions would be distinct from those already mentioned in the Conference’s rules of procedure, which states that written contributions from civil society, i.e., international organizations, are to be held by the secretariat of the Conference. Are these one and the same, or different contributions? We would like to have some clarification on this. That is all that our delegation would like to say at this stage.

The President: I thank the representative of Algeria. It is precisely because civil society has not been defined — certainly not by us, and judging by the pace that we discuss things, that would take probably 15 years to reach an agreement — that we have proposed that it should be the Conference that will decide on the requests that it receives. However, I have been listening carefully to you and, when I sum up this segment, I will offer two oral amendments to the draft, seeking to clarify and allay your concerns.

On the question of what “attend” means, I thought I made it clear when I responded to the Ambassador of the United States. Civil society representatives will not be able to speak except at the specially designated session that will be allocated for them to speak.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Mr. So Se Pyong (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea): Allow me to start by commending your efforts, Mr. President, to get the Conference on Disarmament back to its substantive work. As regards civil society participation in the Conference, as already stated at the plenary meeting on 27 January, we welcome enhanced interaction between civil society and the Conference. With respect to your proposal on civil society participation at the Conference, we share the view of many other delegations that civil society organizations should be invited on the basis of the relevance of their work to disarmament, specifically relevance to the items on the Conference’s agenda.

We have to take into consideration the actual benefit provided by the invitees. There should thus be a mechanism for the Conference to carefully screen and approve civil society organizations. We also share the view of other delegations that the Conference might benefit from the results and lessons learned from the Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum on 19 March. We know that there is a clear distinction between your proposal and the civil society forum, but we can at least learn lessons about the selection of participants. As the Acting Secretary-General mentioned, some 100 civil society organizations will be invited to this forum to facilitate the interactive discussion on the Conference’s four core agenda items. In this regard, I would think that we could at least benefit from the criteria for selecting the civil society organizations that would be participating in this forum.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Ms. Levy (South Africa): The South African delegation does not intend to repeat what we said in our statement last week about participation of civil society. We simply wish to thank you very much for your efforts on this matter, Mr. President, including the original proposal as well as the updated proposal that you have just put forward now, which seeks to take into account the views that were expressed at the earlier meeting. As you are aware, South Africa has been engaged in efforts to revitalize the work of the Conference of Disarmament. The issue of civil society participation is integral to this and, as such, we would certainly support your proposal, as well as other proposals, to ensure that we take this matter a step further and ensure that we, as the Conference on Disarmament, benefit and are enriched by the participation and contribution of civil society to our discussions. We have seen in other disarmament forums the role that civil society plays in actually sharing its expertise with us, and we certainly believe that, as the Conference on Disarmament, we can also benefit further from that expertise and their views on the various matters that we deal with on our agenda.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa for those comments. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. Motta Pinto Coelho (Brazil): In listening to South Africa, I will just say that she said what I had to say. However, I will repeat it here for the record: that we appreciate your efforts, Mr. President, and we support this draft proposal. We were prepared, as we said last week, to support the original draft, but we think that your efforts to accommodate some of the doubts and questions that emerged last week are satisfactory and address the main elements that might emerge as elements of doubt in this respect.

On the point of the relationship or non-relationship between this discussion and the civil society forum, I would beg to disagree because I think that, actually, it is the civil society forum that would benefit from our discussion here, not the other way round. If we could take a decision on this now, the civil society forum would have much better prospects for success inasmuch as this discussion, which actually deals with the question of legitimacy, would already be solved. Also, there is no need to be precise in this decision on the question of relevance of the civil society organization. Participation by civil society is relevant by definition. So, what is stated in footnote 1 is more than sufficient to accommodate questions on the selection of civil society participation in each annual Conference session. Rather than deciding on this question of authority or values of civil society, I think that we should stick to the procedural legitimacy that is included, if we so decide, according to this draft.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Brazil for his comments. I could not agree more with you on both points that you made. The relevance of civil society should not be called into question, but I have to follow up some of the questions that have been made and therefore I will offer an oral amendment in that respect. Second, I particularly like the way you put the case: if there is a linkage, it is the other way round, not the way that some colleagues have voiced the linkage. However, some might disagree with our view, Ambassador.

(spoke in Spanish)

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Spain.

Mr. Herráiz España (Spain) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Mr. President, I should like once again to thank you for the practical and frankly laudable work that you are doing to bring a breath of fresh air to the Conference on Disarmament, including with this proposal. I think this is an initiative and a concern that we have for some time now had in the European

Union, as we wondered how to introduce greater participation of civil society. We have before us a proposal that seeks to maintain the balance in the understanding that this Conference has the will and the vocation to negotiate, and not just to debate. The participation of civil society naturally raises a series of reservations among some delegations, but I believe these can be addressed with the prudent approach that you have reflected in the draft. I think the corresponding elements can be incorporated in the text without the use of footnotes. We also believe that civil society should include not only NGOs, but also people from academia and experts. I thus feel that this draft is a realistic proposal that should be applied and interpreted in future practice with this same balance, bearing in mind that negotiations fall within the competence of States, not NGOs or civil society. This balance will be the principle by which we will in future have to interpret participation in our work. If this draft cannot ultimately be adopted by the Conference, then I think that the suggestion already put forward by some delegations that the civil society forum, which is indeed completely distinct from the subject at hand, may be organized and held more regularly, every year, merits attention. Obviously, that would be an alternative that is not commensurate with what you are proposing to us, but it is one that in any case may be considered in the future.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Ambassador of Spain for his statement.

(*spoke in English*)

The last speaker on my list is the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Deyneko (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I should like to apologize to those in attendance for once again taking the floor, but I would like to make a few comments on what has been said by many speakers.

The first is about the lack of a link between the draft decision we are discussing and the informal Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum to be held on 19 March. As far as I can remember, when this decision was taken the intention was to assess, after the event, the extent to which civil society could in a professional and expert manner discuss the key problems of disarmament on the Conference's agenda. And as far as I can remember, following this event, the corresponding conclusions were to be drawn as to whether civil society and civil society representatives could make a new contribution to the Conference to help it break the deadlock. I understand and respect the position of those delegations that have consistently held that civil society should be actively included in the Conference's work. But I cannot understand the position of those delegations that first agreed to one decision and then, before that decision is implemented — in other words, before the holding of the event on 19 March — are prepared to vote for or take another decision that does not fully correspond with the previous one.

Secondly, as for the participation of civil society in this body, generally, the forum presents a good opportunity to examine and assess the level of professional preparedness and, as said by many, the criteria for gauging aptitude and the added value of NGO participation. Now we are taking a decision that will make the forum unnecessary for NGOs, as we will completely open our doors and on 15 or 17 January we will be presented with a list of NGOs — and it is anyone's guess how many — and we will then say "let us take a decision". Incidentally, the procedure is the same as the one used for States, with a slight difference, which for some delegations to the Conference could present a problem of principle. We know the States. But we do not know all the NGOs; far from it. Thus, the question of criteria is exceptionally important. This is directed to those who are involved in the discussion of the criteria.

I have already said something about the irreversibility of our decision. Let us now look back a bit. We all remember the last nuclear arms reduction and limitation treaty

between the Russian Federation and the United States of America. I doubt whether the START II Treaty could have been concluded with the participation of NGOs, with all due respect for their expertise. We could hardly have achieved extremely difficult compromises in conditions where the issues under discussion could be leaked left and right or to the press. I want to put this in perspective. Distinguished colleagues, think about any serious negotiations, and first and foremost those on nuclear disarmament. In this field, there are indeed non-proliferation aspects, as well as many others. Apparently, no one who has taken the floor on this question has addressed this. I understand that if we are discussing treaties that regulate something, such as the international Arms Trade Treaty, then that is a different matter. But when we are discussing actual reduction and limitation, or actual measures for practical disarmament, excuse me, but I believe the situation is somewhat different.

Now, about future prospects, many here have spoken about the experience of other international forums, and we know about them. The first one that comes to mind within the United Nations is the First Committee and NGO participation in its work. Fine. Let us take the next step, which is to extend membership to all the Member States of the United Nations. Fine. Now let us take another, final, step. Let us get rid of the consensus rule and move instead to the generally recognized, or should I say, globally recognized, methods of work used by the United Nations General Assembly. In that case, what purpose is served by the Conference on Disarmament? How is it unique? How is it then different from the First Committee? Well, it would not be, except for the fact that it has a formal, written mandate for negotiations. We would have participation by NGOs and by all the Member States of the United Nations. Maybe that is good. I do not know. We would also have the general rules under which the General Assembly works. That means the documents, or in our case, the treaties, will be adopted by a simple majority. Is a disarmament forum really necessary if in many or most aspects it duplicates the work of the First Committee? I do not think so. There have been precedents, where certain disarmament questions have been taken up by the United Nations General Assembly. I am just trying to give us all some food for thought. Of course, I understand that this will not change your position.

There is a last point to which I should like to draw your attention. As you know, we came within one step of adopting the programme of work, because it was introduced according to the principle of "all or nothing". No additional consultations were held and no attempts were made to find a compromise on the most important question facing the Conference. Now we see a propensity to move towards compromise on a question that has no particular importance for the future of the Conference. We can only welcome this state of mind. But our delegation would like it to be applied first of all in the search for mutually acceptable solutions to the problems that are in principle of importance or crucial to the Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of Russia for his statement. A couple comments on the example that you gave about the START treaty negotiations. Our draft here provides for closed meetings. So, if we are going to negotiate something meaningful, and I wish we would at some point, there will be space for closed meetings if needed. That issue has thus been taken care of.

Second, you ask how it is that we can be making a decision after we already made a decision to organize the civil society forum. I think I need to clarify, or remind us all, that we did not decide anything on the civil society forum. It was not put before the Conference; it was not decided by the Conference. It is a personal initiative of the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament/Acting Director-General. So, we are not taking a decision after we made a decision. We did not make a decision. My guess is that had Mr. Møller put this for a decision by the Conference on Disarmament, we would still be discussing it at this point.

As a final comment, I do not think that I can share the view of those who believe that the civil society forum is for us to assess or evaluate civil society, its contribution or its added value. I will not be attending the civil society forum for that purpose and I hope you will not either.

The Ambassador of the United States would like to take the floor.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor once again, Mr. President, but I think I may have the source for some of the confusion about the linkage between the forum and your proposal. I take us back to Mr. Møller's comments on 20 May of last year, and I will just quote the few sentences here that I think are pertinent. I will read it very slowly but as quickly as I can: "In this regard, I suggest for your consideration as a first practical step before the end of the year, the holding of an informal Conference on Disarmament/civil society forum, hosted by the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and, if the experience is a constructive one, you could then decide to have it as a recurring event until such time that you may decide to adapt the Conference on Disarmament's rules of procedure to allow for greater and more formal interaction with civil society."

So, Mr. President, I think that is maybe the basis for some of the linkage between the two.

The President: Thank you for that. Let me just stress that I had consulted this initiative with the Acting Director-General and he did not have any objection to making this proposal. So, there is no contradiction, but thank you for reminding us.

I shall now try to sum up today's discussions. I would like to say, first of all, thank you for your input. There were a good number of participants — I do not know how many — but a long list of participants. I think it was a very interesting debate and I thank you for that. I have to say that I read behind many of the interventions' philosophical differences of opinion on the value of civil society participation. Some of you posed questions and raised concerns, some of which were specific to the draft, but I noticed that behind some of these questions are more philosophical questions as to whether or not we should open the Conference on Disarmament to civil society participation. It is a philosophical difference of opinion. Because of that, I think we need to reach some conclusions and bring closure to this issue on Friday. In order for us to do that, I will offer two verbal amendments to the draft, so that you can take it home.

In operative paragraph 1, after "Representatives of civil society" we would add the words "working in the field of international security, arms control and disarmament". Operative paragraph 1 would thus now read: "Representatives of civil society working in the field of international security, arms control and disarmament should be allowed, upon request, to attend the meetings of the Conference other than those designated closed, to be seated in the designated area, to receive documents of the Conference and, at their own expense, to make written material available to the participants in the Conference."

In operative paragraph 2, strike out the words "non-governmental organizations" and substitute those words with "representatives of civil society".

I see Belarus asking for the floor. We are not discussing this anymore. Do you have any doubt as to the ... No? Then, I will not give you the floor, because we are not discussing this. We will discuss this on Friday.

As I said, I will try to bring this issue to closure on Friday, either by adopting it or not. I do not believe that — and this goes along with some of the comments made — we need to focus on other issues. I see that the main difference might have to do more with a philosophical difference of opinion as to the contribution that civil society might be able to make, or not, to the Conference on Disarmament, rather than with the actual draft.

When you consult with your capitals and when you discuss among yourselves and reflect on what happened today, I would ask you — and this is by way of responding to some of your questions — why you accepted this very same procedure for the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but you would not be willing to accept it for the Conference on Disarmament. This is exactly the same procedure that we follow with the NPT. So, please come back on Friday and tell me why you can accept it there but cannot accept it here. It will be interesting to understand the difference, since the NPT is a forum that has to do with issues that are relevant and pertinent to this body.

Again, I wish to thank you for your contributions today.

Allow me now to continue our discussions on issues pertaining to the rules of procedure. I would like to devote the rest of the time that we have available to the Conference's methods of work. During our plenary meetings and during my consultations today, I have heard the voices of those who believe that, in the absence of the adoption of a programme of work during my presidency, they — you, or some of you — find strong merit in focusing some of our efforts on other elements that may contribute to the revitalizing of the Conference. As I mentioned at our last plenary meeting, in the opinion of this presidency, our differences may only — can only — be breached by changing the culture of the Conference. In this regard, I would like to evoke the call made by the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament at the 1316th plenary meeting of the Conference concerning the establishment of a subsidiary body on the methods of work. In our view, one way to contribute to changing the culture of the Conference would be to ensure that the Conference's methods of work do not hinder, but promote, its ability to fulfil its mandate, that is, to negotiate. Taking these aspects into consideration, I have prepared a draft decision for the establishment of a subsidiary body to consider all the issues related to the Conference's methods of work and to propose a way forward. I will ask the secretariat to circulate it. The draft decision is contained in document CD/WP.586, which the secretariat is now distributing to you for review before its submission for action. I was intending to suspend the meeting for 20 minutes in order for you to go through it and come back, but if we suspend for 20 minutes we will have very little time. However, I will allow, without suspending the meeting, anyone who wishes to react on it initially to do so.

Before you react, allow me to make two oral amendments to the draft. The first one is purely technical. The date is wrong. It should of course read "2015", not "2014". Let the record show that the date of the draft should read "2015".

The second amendment, almost at the end of the document in the paragraph starting with "The working group shall meet for up to five working days under the Chairmanship of ..." and then you find two blank spaces. The paragraph should read as follows: "The working group shall meet for up to five working days under the Chairmanship of His Excellency Urs Schmid, Ambassador of Switzerland." Ambassador Schmid has kindly accepted to take on the responsibility should the Conference decide to adopt this proposal.

We have 40 minutes left. Maybe we can suspend the meeting for 10 minutes and allow for half an hour of initial reactions before we adjourn our meeting at 1 p.m.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. I know that I have given you even less than the usual short time frame to familiarize yourselves with the proposal, but I would like to give the floor during the remaining 25 minutes of our meeting today to anyone who would like to speak on this matter. As you can see, it is just a couple of points. To repeat, it is based on the Acting Secretary-General's proposal and also draws on some experiences from the Kenyan and the Japanese idea — not formal proposals — formulated last year. It is a straightforward proposal: see what you think.

I recognize the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Atta (Egypt): Thank you, Mr. President, for this draft proposal. It is another sign of your steadfastness in promoting, or pushing forward, the work of this forum. I just have two preliminary remarks. One concerns the composition of the working group and whether we should include in the language used in this proposal something about how the working group is going to be formed.

The second point is that I do not know whether it is relevant to limit ourselves to codifying best practices or whether it may be preferable to leave it more general so that new ideas may be incorporated, rather than limiting ourselves to the best practices that have been used here in the Conference.

Those are my two preliminary remarks. I, of course, will send the draft proposal to my capital and await their feedback.

The President: Just as a quick response, the draft indicates that the working group is open to members of the Conference on Disarmament — to all members — so, it is not a closed meeting. It is not only representatives: it is all members of the Conference who will participate in this.

I recognize the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Sano (Japan): We truly appreciate your initiative, Mr. President. This is a very important document and we will have to look at it carefully. Comparing it with the proposal put forward by the Kenyan Ambassador last July, I would like to clarify two points.

The Kenyan proposal was to establish a closed informal working group that is open to all member States but not to civil society, for example, or to members of the informal group of observer States. Just to clarify, if it is open, is there any limitation on participants? Is it supposed to be partially closed? Is participation by invitation? I would like to receive clarification.

The second question refers to operative paragraph 1, which says “to codify some of the best practices that have emerged”. I am not quite sure what that really means and I just want to get clarification.

The President: On your first question, according to the rules of procedure, unless we state otherwise, this group is open only to member States. Unless otherwise spelled out — and here it is not otherwise spelled out — it is open only to member States.

On your second question, codification is an ample term that means that the objective will be to see whether some of the best practices and some of the conclusions of the working group could be introduced into the rules of procedure as amendments or as a stand-alone decision. That is open to discussion and up to the Conference in the end, because, as you can see in the draft, the Chair of the working group will have to report back to the Conference with recommendations and these recommendations, if any, will be subject to your approval. In the end, it will be a decision of the Conference as to whether or not to take on board some of the recommendations that the working group — through its Chair — will present to the Conference.

I give the floor to the representative of Belarus.

Mr. Grinevich (Belarus): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your proposal. My remarks may be very close to those already made by the representative of Egypt. In operative paragraph 1, it should perhaps be clarified that “working group” means “open-ended working group”, that is to say, open to all member States. In principle, our delegation is not against participation of the informal group of observer States because all informal meetings at the last session were open to observer States as well.

The President: I thank the representative of Belarus for his remarks. I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Khelif (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, for your efforts and for your innovative way of encouraging us to discuss such important matters in the Conference on Disarmament on the basis of these documents and drafts. This exercise, which is similar to what we have to do every two or three weeks, has elicited a very productive discussion.

Like other delegations, we have just recently seen the document. In general terms, I should like first to reiterate our country's point of view in respect of the current situation of the Conference on Disarmament. At this point, our delegation continues to believe that the reasons for the deadlock at the Conference are not to be found in the methodology; it is not a problem of method that is blocking our progress. The problem is deeper, and the solutions must be found outside of the Conference. Mr. President, it is a question of policy, external to the Conference. And this is not just the view of Algeria. It is also the conclusion that the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters drew in 2011, when the Secretary-General had asked it to carry out consultations with Member States in order to draw up recommendations. The Advisory Board noted that the problem with the Conference and its deadlock were attributable to political factors. The Board's report is available on the United Nations website.

If, however, it was necessary to have a discussion about the Conference's methods of work in an appropriate framework accepted by consensus within the Conference, our delegation would not fail to take part and to share its point of view.

We thus feel that an attempt to find solutions by addressing solely procedural issues merely obscures the other aspect of the problem. We believe that trying to discuss and consider ways to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament would perhaps give us greater opportunities to discuss all the issues blocking the Conference and the reasons underlying the deadlock.

At this stage, Mr. President, I would merely like to have two clarifications in respect of the first and third preambular paragraphs. At this point we do not have any proposals, but I wonder whether these paragraphs can be reworded. The second line of the first preambular paragraph reads, and I quote, "to provide an opportunity to codify some of the best practices that have emerged". I think I understand the English text. I believe it means there are some practices that have emerged within the Conference that are best or good practices, and our work will consist in trying to codify them. I would like to know about these good practices that have emerged in the Conference before discussing them.

Secondly, the second preambular paragraph states that the working group will be chaired by the Ambassador. Will the Ambassador be named by a decision of the Conference, or by the President?

Thirdly, we would simply like to specify that any report submitted for the consideration of the Conference should incorporate and reflect the opinions of all States and groups of States that are members of the Conference. That is an essential element that perhaps must be mentioned while we wait for States to take positions on the draft. Of course, this draft will be forwarded to my capital for consideration, and we will share with you our views on this subject at a later stage.

The President: On the preambular paragraphs, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 are direct quotes from the General Assembly resolution that was adopted by the Assembly last December, which was based on a draft that you, yourselves, approved here. This is agreed language and I believe they are fitting preambular paragraphs because they are not, I hope,

up again for negotiation since we already negotiated them last September in this very chamber.

As to the best practices, if you want to find out what they are, I suggest that you support the approval of this proposal and that you participate in the working group so that you, together with the other members, can find out and identify which are the best practices. That is the whole intention of having the working group: to identify best practices and see which of those practices can be codified or how we can improve our working methods so that we can make progress.

Concerning the Chair, the decision, if adopted, says clearly that the group will meet under the chairmanship of the Swiss Ambassador. That is my proposal. As I said at the outset, I made two oral amendments and I included the name of the Ambassador of Switzerland as the Chair that I propose as part of this draft — as Chair of the working group. I hope that there is no misunderstanding on that.

Mr. Khelif (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, thank you for your clarifications. With regard to the first, second and third paragraphs, and especially the first and third, while it is true that these paragraphs were adopted as part of a General Assembly resolution, that resolution was adopted in a different context. Today, we have another context. Specifically, we are discussing the methods of work of the Conference on Disarmament. I therefore do not know whether we can simply take up other paragraphs from a resolution and insert them here. I do not know whether this will solve the problem. I think we are facing a specific case, with a concrete proposal that departs from the context in which the General Assembly resolution from which you took these two paragraphs was adopted.

The President: With all due respect, the situation here is not the operative paragraphs: it is the working methods. That is what should be discussed. I am really not inclined to negotiate for a drafting exercise of operative paragraphs. I hope that, if you have substantive objections to the establishment of a working group, you will concentrate your position on those objections and let us not start a drafting exercise on preambular paragraphs. That is the question I had. Let us not lose more time on that.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): I have heard today calls from many to focus on the substantive issues before the Conference on Disarmament. We note that last year we had both a working group on a programme of work and a schedule of informal discussions with that end in mind. The United Kingdom would certainly prioritize the re-establishment of the working group on a programme of work. It would allow for more meaningful discussions on that subject than was possible during your hurried efforts early this month. We would also prioritize continuation of the informal discussions which we felt were useful. So, at first glance we would not necessarily rule out establishment of a working group on methods of work, but we would certainly prioritize efforts to restart our substantive work first.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. The whole nature or essence of a subsidiary body is to allow for some work to be done in parallel with other areas. Do not think that establishing this working group will preclude the establishment of any other working group or any other substantive discussion that might take place in plenary. So, it is not “either”, but should be seen as “and”.

Mr. Rowland (United Kingdom): Yes, I would not say, Mr. President, that it is “either/or”, but it might be a package.

The President: We have seen that packages do not work in this hall, so I am taking a different approach. As my presidency will soon end, you will be relieved soon of my approaches and tactics.

I now recognize the representative of Australia.

Mr. McConville (Australia): Allow me to say how much we appreciate your genuine efforts, Mr. President, to move forward the work we are doing here. I hope we can all participate in somehow reaching a substantive outcome in the course of this session and subsequently throughout the year. Obviously, we will be consulting our capital on the proposal. I think, as has been mentioned by our Algerian colleague, there are of course issues beyond the walls of this Conference that prevent and obstruct our getting together a programme of work and working to negotiate, which is what we are all trying to do. I think we should, nevertheless, be open to all opportunities we have to look and appraise what we do and see if there are better ways that we can achieve our outcome. I think it behoves us all to look at this with a fresh eye. Certainly, from the Australian perspective, we will be very happy to participate.

Our Egyptian colleague raised a useful point in relation to operative paragraph 1. I wonder if we could suggest some wording that might expand the mandate of this working group, not just about the best practices that have emerged, but more about ways that we might be able to enhance and improve what we do in a more general sense. The wording I would suggest is “provide an opportunity to” and then, instead of “codify”, we suggest the wording “better facilitate the substantive work of the Conference”. I think this would allow consideration of issues behind the best practices that we might have developed within the Conference.

The final point is to acknowledge the willingness of Ambassador Schmid to take on this role. We wish him the best and we will of course support him in his endeavours if the proposal is endorsed by the Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of Australia for that constructive proposal. I now give the floor to the Russian Federation.

Mr. Malov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, I should like very briefly to talk about the operative part and the understanding of the meaning of “codify”, which it seems has not changed. We have a question, though. What is understood by the words “best practices”? I think here too we have to make some sense out of this and set out definitions. If we are talking about the style and form of work, that is one thing, but if we are discussing some fundamental, basic, key principles of the Conference’s work, and these questions came up in our discussions, we could hardly refer to them as best practices. We therefore believe we have to come to a single understanding of what is understood by best practices. We submit this as a preliminary comment.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation. I give the floor to the representative of Algeria, once more.

Mr. Khelif (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The Algerian delegation apologizes for taking the floor again but wishes to make a comment on operative paragraph 1. It may be because my English is not perfect, but when I see the tense used

(*spoke in English*)

... we see that the tense used here is the present perfect, so, in my understanding — and perhaps the Ambassador of the United Kingdom can help me to understand because the text is in English — my understanding is that we have to codify the best practices that have emerged in the light of past practices, not the best practices that could emerge through our discussions. That is what I understand from the text. If that understanding is true, in other

words, that we have to agree on something that emerged from the past, perhaps we need to think about the language to use. What I understood from your last statement, Mr. President, is that you are asking me to take it or leave it. If that is the case, I cannot say anything at this stage and I have to go back to my capital.

The President: Just as a point of clarification to the representative of Algeria, I am asking you to concentrate on the substance. This is a simple, straightforward draft decision to establish a working group. If we start drafting the preambular paragraphs at this time, then we will be here for the next six months drafting preambular paragraphs. My respectful request is that you try to concentrate on the operative paragraphs, which are the paragraphs that in the end will have an effect on the work of the working group. The rest is just to put the decision into context. Now, it is your prerogative to try to amend everything you want: it is not to take it or leave it. It is just a respectful invitation so that we can at least decide on something and not be caught up in endless discussions on how to put into context the need to establish a working group.

I see that you want to continue this discussion. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Khelif (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, for your clarifications. I understand full well what you mean, but it is hard to separate the wording from the substantive questions. As the representative of the Russian Federation has said, the aim of this exercise is to find new working procedures to allow the Conference to move forward. We believe that using this concept of best practices brings us away from the underlying objective of this initiative, which is intended to improve the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament and its rules of procedure. They are two entirely different things.

The President: As I said before, I was referring to your earlier point on preliminary paragraphs. On your constructive point on operative paragraph 1, I heard you and I heard the Australian proposal. So, if you allow me to sum up this discussion, I will come back to your concern that is shared by others on operative paragraph 1.

I recognize the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Atta (Egypt): My apologies, Mr. President, for taking the floor again. I just have a question for the secretariat, if you would allow. Do we have a compendium that collects all the best practices that have emerged during the work of the Conference on Disarmament?

The President: Maybe I should at this point submit an oral amendment so that we can leave the issue of best practices behind, as it has caused a lot of trouble. I now offer two oral amendments to the proposal for you to take home, forgetting about best practices.

Operative paragraph 1 will read as proposed by Australia, which is as follows: "To establish a working group to review the methods of work of the Conference to provide an opportunity to better facilitate the substantive work of the Conference."

I think that is a very good suggestion by Australia, in their mother tongue, which is always an advantage, at least against me. With that, I hope that we can leave behind the discussion of what "best practices" means.

I will read it again. Operative paragraph 1 will read: "To establish a working group to review the methods of work of the Conference to provide an opportunity to better facilitate the substantive work of the Conference."

The second amendment, in operative paragraph 3, is to add the following words after "report" on the first line: "of the views expressed by all the members". Operative paragraph 3 would thus read: "The Chairperson of the group shall deliver a report on the views expressed by all the members and recommendations, in his personal capacity, on this matter

to the Conference on Disarmament before the end of the fifth presidency of its 2015 session for its consideration.” We thus also take into consideration the Egyptian concern about the importance of reporting the views expressed.

I recognize the representative of Belarus. It is 1.05 p.m., so this will be the last intervention.

Mr. Grinevich (Belarus): Mr. President, I just wished to know if our proposal had been taken into account with regard to inserting “open-ended working group” in the first operative paragraph.

The President: Rule 23 of the rules of procedure reads: “Whenever the Conference deems it advisable for the effective performance of its function, including when it appears that there is a basis to negotiate a draft treaty or other draft texts, the Conference may establish subsidiary bodies, such as ad hoc sub committees, working groups, technical groups or groups of governmental experts, open to all member States of the Conference unless the Conference decides otherwise.”

This draft should be read in conjunction with rule 23. It is open to all member States of the Conference unless the Conference decides otherwise. I do not see the need to clarify that it is open. If the Conference wants to decide to open this working group to others, that has to be a positive decision, which at this point I am not proposing.

As was communicated by the secretariat last Thursday, the plenary meeting convened on Wednesday, 11 February, will be devoted to an interactive discussion on expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament and, as we decided at the beginning of this session, to hearing the views of Ambassador Gyarmati, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

The plenary meeting to be convened on Friday, 13 February, will be devoted to wrapping up the discussions on issues pertaining to the rules of procedure of the Conference and the conclusion of the activities under the presidency of Mexico. In this regard, I intend to continue our efforts to adopt a decision on civil society participation at the Conference and a decision on the establishment of a working group to review the Conference’s methods of work. This will take place at our meeting on 13 February.

Before we adjourn, the secretariat has an announcement to make.

Mr. Fung (Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament) (*spoke in French*): I just wish to remind delegates about the information note circulated earlier, specifically paragraph 10 in which a request was made that any texts submitted for circulation as an official document should be submitted to the secretariat in Word format. We have been receiving an increasing number of requests to circulate texts but the texts are submitted in formats that impede their processing. So, I would simply like to repeat our request that any documents submitted for circulation should be forwarded in Word format.

The President: I thank the secretariat. That concludes our business for today. I thank all of you for your active participation. The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held tomorrow, 11 February 2015, at 10 a.m. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.