

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and nineteenth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 20 August 2019, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Taonga Mushayavanhu.....(Zimbabwe)

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The President: I call to order the 1519th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Dear colleagues, it is an honour for Zimbabwe to take over the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I am pleased to welcome the young Japanese students, the messengers of peace, who are with us in the gallery. Allow me now to deliver a statement on the occasion of this first plenary meeting under the presidency of Zimbabwe.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, allow me once again to express my particular pleasure at Zimbabwe's assumption of the sixth presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2019. Zimbabwe takes this responsibility very seriously because of its avowed commitment to ridding the world of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. It is also in accord with our abiding adherence to a foreign policy that advocates self-determination and independence, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, cooperation and development.

Assuming the Conference presidency is a challenge that I and my team are happy to take on even in the face of the political realities within the Conference. We are determined to pursue a positive, balanced, inclusive, transparent and consultative process, guided by the rules of procedure, to arrive at a consensus.

Coming from a nuclear-free continent, Africa, Zimbabwe undertakes to do all in its power to build bridges in a Conference which finds itself at a critical juncture – a Conference that has been paralysed for far too long, a conference that can and should negotiate treaties to eliminate and prohibit nuclear weapons, to prevent an arms race in outer space, to provide effective security assurances to non-nuclear States, such as Zimbabwe, to ban the production of fissile material for the production of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices and to negotiate treaties on many other disarmament matters. All we need to do is to summon the political will. For without that, the risk is that the Conference may end up losing the characterization of being “the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community”.

Distinguished delegates, it would be remiss of me if I did not once again pay tribute to the immediate past President of the Conference, Ambassador Duong Chi Dung of Viet Nam, for the sterling efforts that he and his team exerted in trying to come up with an agreeable programme of work, as well as for the helpful insights that he imparted to me. I would also like to thank the other 2019 Presidents of the Conference for their genuine efforts in the furtherance of the work of the Conference.

During this session, my predecessors have conducted intensive consultations with a view to reaching consensus on the programme of work. They put forward proposals which were debated in many meetings in the Conference; however, the Conference has failed to agree on a programme of work or to establish any mechanism to take forward the agenda items for the 2019 session.

Nevertheless, the proposal of the Netherlands seems to have opened a pathway which may assist future presidencies. Without prejudice to the ideas that future Presidents may have, it is our hope that the simplified approach will receive due attention. It is our view that delegations will need some time to reflect on this proposal.

In view of these developments, the Zimbabwean presidency will not spend more time on trying to come up with a programme of work. We believe that the hour is late for such an attempt. However, we hope that in the next session of the Conference, members will put the challenges of the current session behind them and cooperate fully with Algeria, so that we might come to an early agreement on a programme of work, in compliance with rule 28 of the Conference's rules of procedure. On our part, we will consult on this matter with Algeria, as is expected of us, in the intersessional period.

Regarding thematic discussions, some of my predecessors organized extensive and beneficial thematic discussions on the agenda items, sometimes with the participation of experts. It is our hope that these thematic discussions will help us to identify common landing zones, so that we can embark on disarmament negotiations, which are the real mandate of the Conference. Nevertheless, in my ongoing consultations, the view I am getting is that the Conference has had enough thematic panel discussions for the current

session. Our presidency therefore intends not to organize any thematic panel discussions but to leave the door open for any specific requests.

This, then, leads me to the last agenda item of this session, which is “Consideration and adoption of the annual report and any other reports, as appropriate, to the General Assembly of the United Nations”. This last agenda item is what I propose to be the focus of the sixth presidency of 2019. In the current circumstances, we would not realistically raise our level of ambition beyond this limited focus.

Distinguished delegates, ahead of my assumption of the presidency of the Conference, I began informal consultations with some of you to sound you out on a number of issues regarding the shape and content of the annual report, as well as the possibility of continuing with the thematic discussions under this presidency. I wish to thank all of you for your wise counsel and candid views. Now that I am officially in the Chair, I intend to intensify these consultations with a view to finding common ground on the form and content of a report that is acceptable to all members.

On the basis of the consultations carried out so far and with the assistance of the secretariat, I have already embarked on the preparation of a draft report, as required by rule 44, for the consideration of the membership. In preparing the report, I was guided by the precedents that were set by the 2018 report, the most recent report, and by the previous annual reports. I have also been guided by rule 45 of the rules of procedure, which says that the report shall “be factual and reflect the negotiations and work of the Conference”. Members will appreciate that we did not achieve much this year, and an annual report cannot make up for that shortfall, so the report will be quite limited in its extent. The zero draft of this report should be circulated tomorrow or, if the edits are cleared, maybe later today, but most probably tomorrow.

Regarding organizational matters, we have planned for a total of seven plenary meetings, including today’s. The Conference will not meet this Thursday, 22 August, to allow for informal consultations on the draft annual report. It is our intention to have a general exchange of views on Tuesday, 27 September, and to begin a paragraph-by-paragraph reading of the report on the same day, if possible. We intend to continue this paragraph-by-paragraph track on Thursday, 29 August; then, on both Tuesday, 3 September, and Wednesday, 4 September, the Conference will continue to consult on outstanding paragraphs. If we do not reach agreement during the first week of September, we will then have to continue, obviously, to search for consensus in the last week of this session, most probably on 10 and 12 September. However, we also have to make time before 13 September for the consideration of the draft resolution for the General Assembly.

Still on organizational matters, let me add that our meetings will begin with formal segments to allow members to address the Conference on any subject relevant to the work of the Conference, as provided for under rule 30 of the rules of procedure. Thereafter, we will conduct our consultations in informal mode to allow for a free exchange of views. We intend to call for meetings in the mornings, except for 4 September, so that we can devote the rest of the time to bilateral and group consultations, if those are necessary going forward.

I am an optimist by nature, and a while back I said to a colleague as we were walking into this room that in some parts of the world, including mine, the coming of the rains is a good sign, so, with the rains out there, we are starting with an auspicious signal. Although I am, as I said, an optimist by nature, I am still realistic, and we may need to adjust our programme as we go along. If we reach agreement earlier than the fourth week of our presidency, which, with my optimism, I hope will happen, I will be happy to bang the gavel and bring the 2019 session to a close.

Finally, while recognizing that this has been a challenging session, we still need an annual report to send a clear and strong message to the General Assembly that the Conference remains the single global multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. Through the annual report, we should also send a positive signal for the 2020 session, so that Algeria and the succeeding presidencies can take this Conference to higher levels.

Colleagues, many outstanding diplomats before us, and maybe some in this room, have been able to overcome challenges and find each other and negotiate some of the landmark multilateral disarmament instruments of our time in the Conference. With that in mind, I am determined that we should have a report and therefore I look forward to your cooperation in the important task that we are embarking on today. As always, we are appreciative of the secretariat's key role in facilitating our work. I thank you.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, at this time I would like now to open the floor to delegations for any remarks or comments that they may want to make. The floor is open. I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to congratulate you, Ambassador Mushayavanhu of Zimbabwe, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Our appreciation goes to the Conference secretariat for its support in organizing this plenary meeting. We wish the Zimbabwean presidency every success in achieving its objectives and in the important task that it will be undertaking in the coming weeks.

Allow me to reiterate my delegation's commitment to working constructively in order to achieve the consensus necessary for adopting the report that the Conference will present to the General Assembly. We therefore welcome your decision to focus the efforts of your presidency on the negotiation of this important document. We keenly await the zero draft of the report of the Conference, which you are currently preparing, and we invite you to continue holding the consultations necessary for achieving a balanced and inclusive document that gives an account of our work. Thank you, Mr. President, and I wish you every success in your endeavours.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for his kind words. The floor is open. I now give the floor to the representative of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all permit me on behalf of my delegation to congratulate Zimbabwe on its assumption of the last rotating presidency of the Conference this year. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, the Ambassador from Viet Nam, on his successful conduct of the responsibilities of the presidency. I also would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who assumed the rotating presidency this year, all of whom very conscientiously carried out their functions and endeavoured to facilitate the efforts of all parties in working on the issue of the Conference's programme of work. At the same time, they conducted a series of thematic discussions in an attempt to give the member States the opportunity to have an earnest exchange of views on the prominent issues before us.

In each of the Conference meetings, our delegation, my colleagues and I have noted the exceptionally great importance placed by the member States on the Conference's role and functions. Everyone hopes that through our common efforts we will be able to bring the Conference to carry out substantive work at an early date. I would like to express my admiration and thanks to this year's previous Presidents of the Conference for their efforts to move the work of the Conference forward.

As for the considerations you just set out for us regarding your work during your presidency, we find them wise and pragmatic. I support your views and am ready to actively cooperate with you and earnestly work on drafting the Conference's report for this year. We are looking forward to your distribution of the zero draft of the report tomorrow. Through these next few weeks, it is our hope that we will all work together to draft this year's annual report of the Conference on Disarmament. We hope that through these weeks of work, we will, all together, be able to show a conscientious attitude and make significant efforts to promote the work of the Conference, even if we have been unable to achieve a programme of work. I also agree with your view that we must, through the report, demonstrate the value and potential of the Conference as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiation mechanism to the United Nations General Assembly and to the international community. We thus look forward to actively cooperating with you in our future work.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the delegation of Japanese students who are attending today's meeting in the gallery. These young students are observing first-hand the Conference's work in the Council Chamber and I hope that this will impress upon them the lessons and reflections of history and lead them to cherish peace, and that it may give them a more comprehensive understanding of the international security situation, nuclear disarmament, outer space issues and other prominent subjects under discussion at the Conference, providing them with a mature and rational attitude and a comprehensive perspective, so that they too, like the Conference's membership, can offer the same support for multilateralism and the Conference.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his statement and his kind words for the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. September (South Africa): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, it is an honour to congratulate you on your assumption of the final presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for this year. As you stated, Mr. President, the main responsibility of your presidency would be to steer the Conference towards the adoption of the annual report and to finalize the Conference resolution for the General Assembly. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to assure you of our support.

My delegation supports the approach you outlined in your opening statement, notably your commitment to transparency and to consultations, especially with Algeria, the first President of the 2020 session of the Conference. My delegation would also like to extend its gratitude to your predecessors as Presidents of the Conference during the current year for the efforts they deployed to allow the Conference to resume substantive work, including negotiations as early as possible, and end the long impasse. We regret that for more than two decades now the Conference has been unable to execute its mandate as the single multilateral negotiating forum for dealing with disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control issues. Being an integral part of the United Nations disarmament machinery, the Conference has, in the past, made a significant practical contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security and is still an important venue for an exchange of views on a broad range of arms control and disarmament issues.

We also want to use this opportunity to call on future Presidents, as well as delegations participating in the Conference, to honour its foundations embodied in the rules of procedure, including the principle of sovereign equality of States. Any attempts to politicize the institution of the Conference are unacceptable and should be resisted. Conference members should therefore make every effort to refrain from actions that could further exacerbate existing tensions and further entrench the stalemate in the Conference.

We urge all the delegations participating in the Conference to redouble their efforts to overcome its stagnation and to resume substantive work. We wish you every success during your tenure as President of the Conference. We are keenly awaiting the draft report. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa for his statement and for his kind words for the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Takamizawa (Japan): Thank you very much. Mr. President, Japan is very happy to join previous speakers in congratulating you on your assumption of the Conference on Disarmament presidency at this important juncture. We are more than willing to cooperate and collaborate to help you to fulfil these important duties. We are also extremely grateful for the kind welcome you gave to our 23 messengers of peace, students who are coming here to convey Japan's sincere desire to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. I am sure they can learn very much by listening to the discussions here under your wise guidance.

Mr. President, we listened to the approach you outlined in your opening remarks on how you are going to guide the discussions here. We support your idea to focus on the consideration and adoption of the final report and to start the discussion with a factual report that reflects the negotiations this year. Even if we start this discussion from the zero draft, I assume that it is going to be a challenging job to adopt a report. Therefore, it is important to learn from our experience of last year or the previous year, in which we

encountered similar difficulties in adopting the report. In this regard, we are glad to hear that you have contacted the States parties that were in the same position last year and the year before.

Mr. President, recalling this year's very constructive and active discussions on the core issues on the Conference agenda and on the programme of work, we hope the report will be conducive to the equally active discussions next year. In this regard, we are happy to hear that you have already contacted Algeria and the group of countries that will occupy the presidency next year.

Mr. President, we support your approach and are more than happy to explore what we can do.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his statement and for his kind words for the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Duong (Viet Nam): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to express all our warm congratulations to you on your assumption of your role as the sixth President of the Conference on Disarmament in 2019 and wish you all the very best in your tenure. I would also like, Mr. President, to express our sincere thanks to you for your support during my presidency and of course to assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation during your tenure. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the Japanese students to come to observe our work in the Conference. Their presence brings us a strong message of a world free of nuclear weapons and wars.

Mr. President, your country takes over the role of leading the Conference and facilitating its work at a very critical moment. It is a time for the Conference to look back on discussions and consultations during the year and to reflect them in our final reports. Following your opening remarks, we highly appreciate your intention to devote the Conference meeting times to the reports.

Mr. President, during the previous presidencies, and most recently during Viet Nam's presidency, many ideas and proposals have been put forward, while extensive and enriching bilateral and multilateral consultations have been held to reach a common understanding on these elements of a programme of work in the hope that these tireless efforts and the time devoted could lead to substantive results – that is, to breaking this 20-year stalemate and reaching a consensus to move the Conference forward. We strongly believe that those efforts will be a good source to refer to in drafting the final reports under your presidency.

Mr. President, Viet Nam stands ready to support your presidency and believes that your goodwill, determination and professionalism will lead the Conference to the successful achievement of tangible results. I thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Viet Nam for his statement and his kind words for the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Dear colleagues, like other delegations, I would like to congratulate the distinguished Ambassador of Zimbabwe on his assumption of the presidency for the final stage of our work this year and his readiness to work with other delegations to prepare the final report.

Mr. President, you face both a difficult and an important task. On behalf of the Russian delegation, I would like to assure you that we will support the ideas that you have put forward for the work of the Conference during this final stage of the 2019 session.

In our view, the report should be an objective reflection of the work that we all did in 2019. By objective, I mean, first, that it should reflect the efforts of those delegations that made a significant contribution to our common efforts to agree on a programme of work. Above all, I have in mind the presidencies that made real and specific proposals in this regard. These are the delegations of Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Venezuela and Viet Nam.

The second meaning of objective, as I see it, is that the report should still reflect the substantive discussions that took place in this room. In this regard, I agree with my

colleague, Ambassador Li Song, that it is very important to do so, as the issues that have been on the agenda of the Conference for decades are indeed now becoming serious and urgent once again.

The third aspect of objectivity, as I understand it, is that it should reflect the discussion that was begun under the Vietnamese presidency. We believe that this discussion should be reflected in the report, as should the contribution of those delegations that participated actively in the discussion, particularly the delegation of the Netherlands, which prepared a solid document, to make it possible for us to return to one of the substantive issues concerning the agreement of a programme of work. That issue is how we in fact view the programme of work itself and its status and how we can work together to overcome the situation that has dominated the work of the Conference for 20 years, by which I mean how we can find a way out of the Conference's current impasse with respect to negotiation.

These are the three main points that, I think, should be reflected in the report. What is most important is that the report that we will reach agreement on should make clear not only to us, but also to those who will be reading it as part of the work of the First Committee of the General Assembly, that the role of the Conference at this stage is not diminishing but, on the contrary, is increasing, and that it is not only the sole negotiating forum with the appropriate mandate, but might also be one of the platforms where international issues of critical importance can be discussed on an ongoing basis during its sessions with a view to commencing negotiations or pre-negotiation work. All these are elements that, I think, should be reflected in the report.

For my part, I would like to affirm the willingness of the Russian delegation to work closely with both the presidency and other delegations to reach agreement on this outcome document.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation and also thank him for his kind words for the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we wish to congratulate you on your election as President of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you that you have the full support and backing of the Cuban delegation. We agree entirely with your professional and transparent approach and with the bilateral consultations that you have been conducting. We look forward to your draft report, the adoption of which should, to our mind, be a depoliticized exercise that enables us to focus on extracting all the lessons learned and positive aspects from this year, all of which should enable the Algerian presidency to start the new year on the right foot. We therefore wish to express our appreciation for all your efforts and your coordination with the future presidency of this Conference. Allow me to thank all the Presidents that have preceded you and to assure you once again of our full endorsement.

The President: I thank the representative of Cuba for his statement and his kind words for the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Berkat (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference. My delegation stands ready to work with you to achieve positive results that meet the aspirations of all.

We welcome all constructive proposals aimed at setting the work of the Conference back on track, in line with its mandate and its rules of procedure. We also welcome all the efforts made by you and by the previous Presidents during this session to ensure continuity in the work of the Conference.

We remain ready to work with you, with all future Presidents and with all member States to achieve our ultimate objective. We rely on your support in that regard.

The President: I thank the representative of Algeria for his statement and for his kind words for the Chair. Would any other delegation like to take the floor? I give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Elsayed (Egypt): Thank you, Mr. President. Very briefly, first allow me to congratulate you for assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation is confident that your able leadership will steer our work in an excellent manner.

I listened very carefully to your opening remarks and thank you for sharing your plan and schedule of activities for the coming weeks. I would like to take this opportunity to ask you to kindly request the secretariat to circulate this timetable if possible. We thank you for your transparency and welcome your decision to focus on the finalization of the report. We are looking forward to receiving the zero draft of the report and are ready to engage constructively and support your efforts to finalize the report as soon as possible.

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation in successfully completing your presidency.

The President: I thank the representative of Egypt, including for his kind words for the Chair. I do not see any more requests for the floor. In that case, thank you very much. The next plenary meeting will take place on Tuesday, 27 August, at 10 a.m. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.