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**Final record of the one thousand six hundred and first plenary meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 3 February 2022 at 10.20 a.m.

*President:* Mr. Li Song .....(China)



**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I declare open the 1601st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, first of all, I would like to extend my best wishes to all the delegations and delegates who celebrate the lunar new year. This Tuesday we celebrate the spring festival for the Year of the Tiger. In Chinese culture, the tiger is a symbol of courage and strength, an omen of blessings and deliverance from evil. I hope that we will be able to make new progress in the Conference's work this year, in a spirit of courage and solidarity. At the same time, I note that the Beijing Winter Olympics will commence tomorrow. The world now looks to China, and China is prepared. Many of the Conference's member States will send teams to take part in the competition, and I would like to wish the teams of all countries success at the Beijing Winter Olympics. At the same time, I also look forward to the impetus and inspiration that this international event symbolizing peace can bring to the Conference. My team has suggested that I share with you, in real time, during or after the meetings, news on the achievements of the athletes from all over the world. I will do my best.

I would like to begin this morning's meeting by inviting the Conference to consider requests from non-member States to participate in the work of the Conference in 2022. I will then invite participants to express their views on the work of the Conference in the current strategic security environment and on the Conference's programme of work. Lastly, I will give the floor to those delegations that have requested to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

I therefore invite the Conference to consider the list of non-member States that, as at 6 p.m. on Monday, 24 January 2022, had filed requests to participate in the work of the Conference in 2022. My suggestion is to consider the list of countries contained in document CD/WP.638 as a whole. I take it that the Conference decides to invite those States to participate in our work this year, in accordance with the rules of procedure.

*It was so decided.*

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Aliabadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, the Islamic Republic of Iran attaches great importance to the Conference on Disarmament as the sole multilateral negotiating body devoted to disarmament. The first special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament entrusted this conference with a mandate to negotiate disarmament instruments on behalf of the international community. Upholding the integrity and efficiency of this august body as well as its inclusiveness should be the top priority for all its members.

Observer status in the Conference on Disarmament is a very important position, and a country that is a candidate for it needs to show its commitment to its mandate and terms of reference. We welcome all observers who have asked to observe the deliberations of the Conference on Disarmament during its 2022 session. We should help this unique forum to use its precious time focusing on its core mandate, instead of politicizing this august body. After all, we need to take lessons from the past, we cannot afford to let this body be distracted from its noble goal, which is nuclear disarmament.

On promoting multilateralism, one cannot have a selective approach; all United Nations Member States should have the opportunity to participate in all multilateral forums in a fair and balanced manner. Selective multilateralism is not an approach that we could support.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement.

Dear colleagues, as we have all witnessed, the Conference on Disarmament has made good progress on the question of the participation of non-member States, laying a good foundation for a smooth start to this year's Conference and for the advancement of substantive work. This is the result of the joint efforts of all of the Conference's member States and a vivid manifestation of genuine multilateralism by all countries. I believe that we are working towards the same goal, which is to respect the legitimate right of every United

Nations Member State to participate in multilateral work in all fields of endeavour. I would like to thank all the parties concerned for their flexibility on relevant issues and also to thank the coordinators of the regional groups and all members of the Bureau for their support and patience in the work of the President during this process.

If there are no other speakers on this topic, we will move on to the next item on the agenda. I call on those members on the list of speakers for today to make their general statements. The first speaker on my list is Ambassador Duncan of New Zealand.

**Ms. Duncan** (New Zealand): As this is the first time that I have taken the floor, Mr. President, I want to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Aotearoa New Zealand wishes you every success in this role as the inaugural president in 2022. I also wish you and your delegation a peaceful and prosperous Year of the Tiger and a happy lunar new year. The New Zealand delegation also welcomes and looks forward to working closely with all new colleagues who have assumed their positions since we last met in 2021.

Mr. President, as we begin 2022, the world is becoming a more unpredictable and dangerous place. Developments in international security and disarmament have been negative for some years now. Just last month, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* revised its Doomsday Clock. The world remains stuck at 100 seconds to midnight, the closest it has ever been to midnight and the risk of nuclear war. This only makes the mission before us of achieving arms control in disarmament agreements more urgent. Our governments must find ways to reduce tensions, build trust and renew cooperation between us.

On the critical issues of disarmament and arms control, we can each of us contribute to this shared goal if we are prepared to work together; so let's get to work! We must agree on a programme of work promptly. For too long, this body has deliberated without being able to agree to resume the role for which it exists: to undertake negotiations on new security-related agreements. Arms control and disarmament agreements can help to prevent major crises or be additional guard rails if such crises do occur. This is not a hypothetical argument.

Aotearoa New Zealand remains deeply concerned about the ongoing tension between Russia and Ukraine, including the continuing and unprecedented build-up of Russian military forces on the border with Ukraine. We call on Russia to take steps to reduce tensions and the risk of a severe miscalculation. We have been consistent in our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and we hope that ongoing discussion between the United States, Russia, Ukraine and other partners will bring about an urgent de-escalation of tensions. Aotearoa New Zealand stands ready to support diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

Mr. President, words must mean something, and commitments must be implemented. Just over one month ago, the five Non-Proliferation Treaty nuclear-weapon States issued a joint statement underlining their desire to "work with all States to create a security environment more conducive to progress on disarmament with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all". They stated their intention to seek bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability and prevent an arms race. Importantly the joint statement affirmed that "a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought". A first for the five countries, this was an important signal, issued as it was against the backdrop of increasingly acute strategic tension. It is imperative that it should now be reinforced by concrete action.

In the context of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, I refer colleagues to the responses of the New Agenda Coalition and the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament to this joint statement. In the view of New Zealand, a further welcome signal from the nuclear-weapon States would be a clear reaffirmation of their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament, in accordance with the outcomes agreed at the 2000 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

Later this year, delegations of States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) will meet for the next NPT review conference, the tenth in its history, and the fifth since it was extended indefinitely in 1995. For more than 50 years, the Non-Proliferation Treaty has constituted a cornerstone of international security. Parties to the Treaty must do

all they can to ensure that the elements of the Treaty's grand bargain are enhanced and not weakened at the forthcoming review conference. In light of the linkages between the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the priorities of the Conference on Disarmament and irrespective of differing treaty obligations, there is much this body can do to help.

Mr. President, New Zealand is pleased to see the gathering strength of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which we staunchly support. This year, States parties to that treaty will convene for our first meeting, to be held in Vienna, and we are thankful to our Austrian hosts for doing all they can to ensure a safe and successful meeting. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons sends a strong signal that the very existence of nuclear weapons is untenable, the detonation of even a single nuclear weapon would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences and, at a time when tensions are heightened, we are reminded why action to eliminate these weapons is necessary. We encourage all States – parties, signatories and observers – to join us in Vienna for this meeting.

Mr. President, our disarmament calendar this year remains as busy as ever. New Zealand is active across issues of concern to us, including the call for the prohibition and the regulation of autonomous weapon systems and in forums such as that provided by the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, as well as in work on negotiating and delivering a political declaration on explosive weapons and populated areas, as highlighted in the New Zealand disarmament strategy released last year. Both of these areas of work present us with important opportunities to make our world safer, including for civilians and conflict-stricken regions.

New Zealand is also supporting international efforts to respond to the repeated missile tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions and to encourage a positive conclusion to the resumed negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. Achieving a positive resolution to both of these issues is important for the global non-proliferation regime and for international peace and security.

Mr. President, despite our intense schedule and the scale of the challenges ahead of us, I hope – indeed, I am sure – that we can all work together in a spirit of collegiality and common purpose. In this regard, Mr. President, you, the other Presidents of the 2022 session, together with the last President of the 2021 session and the first of the 2023 session, and all colleagues in this room can count on the full and constructive support of the New Zealand delegation in progressing our shared agenda.

Before concluding, I wish to put on record New Zealand's views on two further matters relating to our Conference's work: firstly, New Zealand strongly supports the principle of open access to all States who wish to have observer status in the Conference on Disarmament. It would be a grave error to suggest that only member States have a stake in multilateral disarmament and arms control. New Zealand strongly favours our conference being open and inclusive; we are therefore very pleased and congratulate you on the decision adopted this morning approving applications for observer status.

Secondly, I wish to add our voice and support to those of the many delegations that have consistently advocated for the Conference on Disarmament to adopt gender-neutral language in its rules of procedure. It is backward and deeply anachronistic that our rules of procedure continue to use language that identifies office-holders as male only, failing to recognize the equality of all human beings, regardless of gender identification, who play an important role in the Conference.

Mr. President, at the beginning of each year, our conference is presented with another opportunity to start afresh. It should be a precious opportunity for revitalization and renewal. Instead, each year that we underutilize our time and fail to negotiate on disarmament is another year that we do not contribute to a safer international security environment, and so damage the reputation of this body and ultimately our own security. All is not yet lost; it is within our gift to make a difference to global security, as we have done in the past. Now we must act on our statements of position and intent and work towards collective results.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of New Zealand for her statement and for her kind words of support for the President. I give the floor to the

Ambassador of Germany, who will speak on behalf of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament.

**Mr. Göbel** (Germany): Mr. President, I take the floor on behalf of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament. I have the honour to read out to you a statement by the Initiative in reaction to the joint statement issued earlier this month by China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament is encouraged by the joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms race by China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and United States of America of 3 January 2022. A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The affirmation of this important truth by all five Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear-weapon States collectively is a welcome development which the Stockholm Initiative strongly supports and expects to contribute to the strengthening of the NPT regime.

Today, dialogue and cooperation between the five nuclear-weapon States are more important than ever before, to reduce tensions and the risk of escalation, but in order to move closer to the common goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, concrete measures towards nuclear disarmament are also urgently needed.

The Stockholm Initiative has presented a feasible way forward in this regard, one that is both realistic and ambitious, through our two joint working papers, “Stepping Stones for Advancing Nuclear Disarmament” and “A Nuclear Risk Reduction Package”. We urge all States parties, in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to positively consider our proposals. Pending the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons, we must advance nuclear disarmament and ensure that, in the interest of humanity, nuclear weapons will never be used again.

The Stockholm Initiative will use the time until the postponed NPT Review Conference to press for further progress.

With your permission, Mr. President, I would like to add in my national capacity that I wholeheartedly welcome all the observers who will be joining in our work this year, and I would like to commend you on your effective efforts in this regard.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of Germany for his statement and for his kind words of support for the President. I now give the floor to Ambassador Baumann of Switzerland.

**Mr. Baumann** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, as this is the first time that I have taken the floor during your presidency, allow me to congratulate you warmly on your assumption of office and assure you of my delegation’s full support for you in the performance of your duties. I would also like to welcome to Geneva the permanent representatives who have joined us for this new session of the Conference.

Mr. President, you have invited us to express our opinion on how the Conference should approach its work this year. In this context, I would like to put forward the following considerations.

First, I welcome the address of our Secretary-General, Ms. Valovaya, last week. We agree with a number of points that she made on that occasion, especially with regard to the importance of multilateralism when contending with the complex security challenges before us. This finding applies in particular to nuclear disarmament. We hope that the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons can be held very soon and, above all, that this event will lead to convincing results. In this respect, we welcome with great interest the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, that was drawn up within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We particularly welcome the affirmation in that statement that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. We hope that all the consequences of that statement will be drawn, in respect of both risk reduction and nuclear disarmament. Switzerland also fully subscribes to the statement just made by the Ambassador of Germany, on behalf of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament. The need to supply a multilateral response of course concerns not only the

challenges of nuclear disarmament, but also other areas such as that of security in outer space, to mention but one of them.

Although I will come back to this subject in greater detail when the time comes, allow me to emphasize that the Conference on Disarmament is supposed to play a central role in formulating multilateral responses to security challenges. The fact that it has been unable to fulfil its mandate for over 25 years raises some fundamental and increasingly urgent questions. The Conference has several items on its agenda, all of which represent challenges to international stability. Each of these items would require the rapid opening of negotiations in order to provide an appropriate answer. However, the political situation does not appear to have moved in a direction that would enable the Conference to take the plunge in the near future.

In the absence of any clear agreement on launching negotiations on a specific item on the Conference's agenda, and this is my second point, we should aim at focusing on substance and making headway in the discussions of all the subjects on our agenda. Of course, our aim in doing so should be to get nearer to starting negotiations. One possibility would be to return to a simplified programme of work which would simply provide a framework for our work, separate from the adoption of a negotiating mandate and therefore to return to a programme of work as it was understood by the Conference from its inception until the middle of the 1990s, when it was operational. Another possibility would be to base ourselves on the approach followed at the 2018 session and to set up subsidiary bodies on various agenda items, which would be tasked with achieving progress on substantive issues in preparation for negotiations. In this connection, we would point out that it was the only session since 1996 at which the Conference agreed on anything substantive. If we decide to try to copy the 2018 approach, we should also stay close to the wording of the decisions adopted at that session, bearing in mind experience acquired since then.

If, after all, we are flexible about the approach taken in order to achieve some progress in our work, one factor seems essential. The current prevailing all-or-nothing approach is preventing virtually any work owing to the lack of a mandate to negotiate and must be reassessed. More than a quarter century of paralysis requires this.

Mr. President, I will not venture further than these considerations in respect of substantive issues and the programme of work, but I would quickly like to raise the matter of the inclusivity of our work. The Conference on Disarmament does not have universal membership, even though the subjects that it deals with concern all the States Members of the United Nations. In this context, it is all the more important that we can associate in our work all States which so ask. We therefore welcome the fact that the Conference has invited all States Members which so request to take part in our work. I would personally like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on this success. It will be essential to retain this approach in the future.

In conclusion, while on the subject of inclusivity, we regret that the Conference was unable to agree on updated version of its rules of procedure last year in order to achieve a gender balance. We hope that we manage to make some progress in this regard this year.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of Switzerland for his statement and for his kind words of support for the President. I would now like to give the floor to the Ambassador of Zimbabwe.

**Mr. Comberbach** (Zimbabwe): Mr. President, allow me to first of all to extend our warm congratulations to you on your assumption of the Conference on Disarmament presidency, to wish you every success in that role and to assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation as you navigate the Conference on Disarmament ship in what are increasingly turbulent waters.

We meet against the backdrop of a seriously deteriorating global security situation, one which is – or should be – of very great concern to all of us. It really should focus our minds on the critical relevance of this forum and the urgent need for us to find a way to bring it back to life, to allow it to focus on live issues, including new or emerging security issues, which, as State Counsellor Wang Yi so correctly said in his message to the Conference on 25 January, are now deeply entwined with what we might term the more traditional

challenges to global security. We need to find a way to migrate back to our treaty negotiating mandate; we need to find the political will to begin that migration.

While my delegation, like many others, was disappointed that the 2020 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference was once again postponed, we nevertheless warmly welcomed the joint statement issued by the five NPT nuclear-weapon States on 3 January 2022 on the prevention of nuclear war and the need to avoid arms races. This joint effort sends a powerful and timely message to all of us here, that there is much work to do and that it is incumbent upon us to find or to regenerate the will which delivered the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention and other disarmament instruments.

Over the past two decades or so, while the Conference on Disarmament has basically marked time, new technologies, new weapons systems – some with obvious nuclear and mass destruction capabilities – and new delivery systems have been developed and deployed. The possibility of so-called “dirty bombs”, of nuclear know-how, falling into the hands of extremists of various persuasions remains real. The past decade or so has seen an alarming rise of such extremism on the African continent, as well as in many other parts of the world, further compounding the already significant developmental challenges posed by climate change and of course the devastating socioeconomic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While we should all be pulling together to address such global challenges, the fact is that we remain far apart, with divisions rooted in long-held suspicions and entrenched positions.

You were very correct, Mr. President, in your opening statement, when you cited lack of trust and confidence among member States as the underlying cause of our inability to move, and when you spoke of the growing politicization of the Conference on Disarmament which, in turn, has led to polarization and an increasingly pronounced “them and us” situation, often reflected in both the content and, sadly, the tone of debates in this chamber. We are all equal here, but the reality, of course, is that Zimbabwe has a very small voice within the Conference on Disarmament. But we are determined to play a constructive, positive role in support of our own vision of a nuclear-free world and the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, the only really cast-iron guarantee against their use.

Mr. President, we are therefore very willing to work with you in full support of your efforts to rebuild levels of trust and confidence, which, as we know, have been severely eroded over the past two decades. Obviously, the key to making progress will be some form of agreement on a programme of work to take us forward. During our own presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, in 2019, we supported the concept of a multi-year programme of work to promote continuity across sessions and to avoid the annual tussle with detailed procedural issues. Many speakers before me have referred to important areas of concern and challenges which require our attention, including the need to address the production of fissile material, the need to prevent an arms race in space and – of signal importance to my delegation – the need for binding negative security assurances. We are hopeful that, under your leadership, Mr. President, and with some more flexibility among member States, we may be able to avoid becoming bogged down once again in procedural details and to move beyond thematic debates towards more substantive work, more in line with our mandate. If we cannot reach agreement on a programme of work and if the consensus on the subsidiary body format remains elusive, then clearly a return to thematic discussions is an option but, in our view, it is our least-best option.

Mr. President, my delegation has no objection at all to an address by the executive secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization; indeed, there is precedence for this and we look forward to welcoming the address by Dr. Floyd.

On the question of applications by observers, my delegation believes that the Conference on Disarmament should be as inclusive as possible and, in this regard, we welcome the very constructive start to our work this morning and commend you personally, Mr. President, for the efforts you have made to lead us in this positive direction.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of Zimbabwe for his statement and for his kind words of support for the President. I would take issue with his statement on just one point. He said that Zimbabwe only has a “small voice” in the

Conference. I think everyone will agree that is not the case. We are all equal members of the Conference, and every country, every member State, has an equally important role to play. I look forward to working with the Ambassador of Zimbabwe and other colleagues and delegations here to make greater contributions to the Conference's work.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

**Mr. Dalcero** (Brazil): At the outset I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the People's Republic of China on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. At the closing of last year's session, we saw your commitment to ensuring a smooth start to our current session and we have witnessed your active consultations this year. You can be assured of my country's full support during your presidency, as can the other Presidents of the Conference on Disarmament in 2022. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Ms. Valovaya, for her thoughtful remarks at the opening of the meeting. Brazil aligns itself with the statement of the Group of 21 delivered by Mongolia.

Mr. President, it is no overstatement to say that the international community would benefit from an effective and functioning Conference on Disarmament. Suspicion and mistrust are the order of the day; as the signs of instability and belligerence are increasing, any sign in the other direction is ever more valuable. A working Conference on Disarmament would be an antidote to the concerning trends towards diplomatic deadlock and even military conflict. More than ever, Conference on Disarmament members must seek a common way to allow the Conference to fully discharge its duties as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. A decision to structure the work of the Conference on Disarmament would send positive ripples across all disarmament regimes in this watershed year.

Despite considerable efforts in the past, the Conference has not been able to adopt a programme of work by consensus for more than a decade. The format of subsidiary bodies adopted in 2018, which was the feasible solution at that moment, did not fulfil the Conference's mandate, but even that much has not been achievable in the latest three years. It is all the more essential that we use the diplomatic tools we have to effectively build trust, find areas of consensus and establish a dialogue on how to improve the international security environment. The Conference on Disarmament is fit to deliver multilateral negotiations on disarmament and other relevant international security issues. Brazil remains fully committed to the task given to the Conference on Disarmament, that of negotiating disarmament instruments.

Mr. President, like other delegations who have spoken before us, we welcome the extension of the New START by the United States of America and the Russian Federation. As a member of the New Agenda Coalition, Brazil has already conveyed its views on the joint statement by the five nuclear-weapon States on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races. In particular, the joint pronouncement that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought is an important indication which must now be translated into concrete actions towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It is regrettable that the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference has once again been postponed, alongside the first meeting of the States parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has taken its toll on the international disarmament regimes; the members of the Conference on Disarmament should endeavour to contain that damage by compromising around a programme of work.

Mr. President, in the next few weeks, the first meeting of the open-ended working group created pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/231 on reducing space threats will convene in Geneva. Brazil welcomes the creation of the open-ended working group and views it as a much-needed opportunity to address growing tensions related to the potential weaponization of space and threats to space systems. Similarly, also in February 2022, the Group of Governmental Experts to further consider nuclear disarmament verification issues will be pursuing its important work on analysing verification tools and formats to face the challenge set forth in its mandate. The Group needs to be innovative while taking into account successful experiences from the past. Brazil expects that the discussions in the context of the Group of Governmental Experts, including on the concept of establishing a group of scientific



and technical experts, may contribute to meaningful advances on nuclear disarmament verification.

In the second semester of this year, we may have to face the challenge of the Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference taking place simultaneously with or very close to the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. They are different forums, mostly followed by different negotiators; nevertheless, we should strive to avoid any overburden, particularly considering that we have a window of opportunity that ought to be harnessed to further strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention.

Among the main issues to be tackled by the disarmament community in Geneva this year is the follow-up process of the Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems. This mechanism is at the centre of discussions regarding the humanitarian impact of emerging technologies. The Group's work must be preserved to ensure the development of a normative and operational framework for autonomous weapon systems. We have come a long way since the beginning of the discussions in the Group of Governmental Experts towards achieving key understandings that have been recognized by all States parties to the Group. Now the Group of Governmental Experts must find a common way to express these understandings and ensure the concerns raised by those weapons are properly addressed. We would like to believe that the lack of consensus regarding the last report by the Group of Governmental Experts was due to the complexity and sensitivity of the subject, rather than supposedly irreconcilable differences between members.

We believe the Group can achieve a concrete, comprehensive and trustworthy result; the material provided by States parties over the past two years bears witness to our efforts to outline all different aspects of this subject. We must protect the process and develop it further.

Finally, Mr. President, you are presiding over the single multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations. Under your guidance, Brazil expects that the Conference on Disarmament constituency will stand up to the challenge of furthering the mandate of this body.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of Brazil for his statement and for his kind words of support for the President. I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

**Mr. Heredia Acosta** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, as this is the first time that my delegation has taken the floor during this session of the Conference on Disarmament, allow me to assure you, Ambassador Li Song, and the People's Republic of China, of the support of Mexico during your tenure. We also convey our best wishes to the countries celebrating the lunar year, and as you rightly said, let us hope that the Year of the Tiger will provide the impetus for this body to emerge from its state of paralysis.

We welcome all the permanent representatives to this body during the current session. We certainly applaud the continuation of the positive practice from recent sessions of collaboration between the group of the six Presidents of this year's session, the last President of last year's and the first of next year. We also appreciate the transparent, inclusive and understanding manner in which you and your team are carrying out your tasks. I assure you that my delegation will continue to work in a collaborative spirit to ensure that the Conference on Disarmament is able break out of its decades-long stalemate and finally resume the negotiating mandate with which it was established. Of course, we are also grateful to the secretariat, as much of its behind-the-scenes work is essential to our deliberations and lays the groundwork for reaching agreements. We wish to state that we align ourselves with the statements read by Mongolia on behalf of the Group of 21 and by Brazil on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition.

As we have seen in recent years and as we have heard in this session, we are currently at a difficult crossroads in the area of international peace and security. As the Secretary-General of this Conference, Ms. Valovaya, said last week, we are witnessing rising global tensions among key players, growing distrust, political competition between major powers and an erosion of the disarmament architecture. What is more, there are once again whisperings of armed confrontation in Europe, under the paradigm of strategic stand-offs between powers. History leaves no doubt as to the catastrophic consequences to which this

can lead. The arms build-up in terms of both quantity and sophistication is also rekindling tensions in South Asia, the Middle East, the South China Sea and several other regions of the world. The consternation expressed in previous years about a potential arms race clearly has not prevented us from becoming fully immersed in one now, aggravated by the unpredictable effects that the emergence of new technologies has on international stability. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has confirmed this by keeping the Doomsday Clock at 100 seconds to midnight, the closest we have been to the apocalypse – closer, even, than during the cold war.

Mexico remains fully convinced that, as the international community as a whole decided after 1945, multilateral diplomacy is the best way to face up to our challenges. In the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, our countries undertook to establish a negotiating body with the full intention of agreeing on harmonized measures to move towards general and complete disarmament as a means of ensuring international peace and security. Given the current situation, the Conference on Disarmament should urgently resume its functions as the main negotiating forum for disarmament issues, as established in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Reality shows that the agenda items are still fully valid and as relevant for negotiation as when they were originally included in the agenda of this body, which has precisely that mandate. Accordingly, my delegation is ready to help us move out of the pretence into which this Conference has been descending for more than 25 years. However, in order to do so, we need to agree on a programme of work that is consistent with the negotiating mandate. My delegation is not willing to formalize the pretence by adopting a programme of work that sets informal discussions as the working standard to follow in the future.

We are open to being proactive and constructive, but only in a spirit that reflects the nature of this Conference. We are also open to using all the tools furnished by the rules of procedure, such as the establishment of subsidiary bodies, provided, as stipulated in rule 24, that they have a clear mandate and there is a willingness to hold formal sessions to avoid empty rhetoric.

My delegation has been a consistent advocate of considering ways to improve the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament, whether or not this involves reforms to its rules of procedure. It is worth reconsidering, for example, whether the monthly rotation of the presidency leaves sufficient room to achieve concrete results. We have also reiterated the need to make the work more inclusive by formalizing the participation of civil society, women and young people. Our delegation has repeatedly called for a rethink of the anachronistic and rigid consensus rule that applies to both substantive and procedural matters, which has given rise to Byzantine discussions on a programme of work that is never adopted. Practice since the Conference first fell into paralysis has shown that disarmament instruments can be negotiated with the universal participation of States. The inclusion of States that have requested to participate should therefore be sincerely appreciated. This sign of vitality can generate new negotiating impetus with innovative ideas.

We welcome the recent decision to approve the participation of all States that have requested observer status and I would like to express my personal appreciation to the President. He has broken away from the flawed practice of recent years where the Conference shut out other voices by denying their requests. Of course, we continue to be strongly in favour of adapting the regulations to use gender-neutral language, which we hope can be considered again during this session. In order to achieve this at the current session, it would be useful to conduct an analysis in each of the official languages to address the legitimate concerns expressed during last year's discussions.

Mexico firmly believes that the General Assembly should call for a discussion on the need for a new special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament or some other mechanism by which we can rethink the institutional set-up of forums that have proved incapable of meeting the demands of the public conscience in the twenty-first century. Mexico is not willing to accept the fallacy that the complex security situation should prevent it from even initiating disarmament negotiations, effectively turning this Conference into a mere deliberative body.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the Ambassador of Mexico for his statement and for his kind words of support for the President. I give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

**Mr. Berkat** (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, my delegation wishes to extend its warmest greetings on the occasion of the Chinese New Year to you and to all the countries that celebrate that event.

My delegation highly appreciates your valuable efforts and the positive and constructive collective spirit that has marked the beginning of the current session of the Conference on Disarmament and has borne fruit in the approval of all the requests made by States to participate in the work of the Conference as observers. Algeria commends this important step towards confirming the openness of the Conference, consolidating its participatory nature and enhancing the spirit of multilateral action, all of which strongly support efforts to resume its substantive work based on its negotiating mandate. We also hope that this step will signal a resumption of the customary practice of approving the entire list of observers. My delegation takes this opportunity to warmly welcome the observer States and to congratulate them on being invited to participate in the work of the Conference. We underscore our full willingness to work jointly with the observers, member States and the presidency to promote the work of the Conference and to achieve positive results.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the representative of Algeria for his statement and for his kind words of support for the President. I see no other requests for the floor. I therefore call on the representative of the Russian Federation, who has said that he wishes to exercise the right of reply at this meeting in response to statements made last week.

**Mr. Belousov** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, our delegation has asked for the floor in exercise of its right of reply in order to comment on some of the statements made at meetings of the Conference.

In particular, the representatives of certain States accused Russia of fanning tension and allegedly having aggressive intentions. Such utterances give rise to some bewilderment, at the very least, since they are devoid of the slightest trace of objective analysis of the prevailing security situation in Europe and the reasons that have led to its deterioration.

I would note that the current difficult state of affairs in Europe has come about not in recent months, but as the result of several years of destructive, conscious actions on the part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a whole and of certain individual States in that bloc. I will mention the most obvious of the causes behind this.

First is the Alliance's avowed policy, a policy that it is implementing, of "containing Russia" which, in essence, comprises nothing other than the exertion of constant, unprecedented military and political pressure on our country. This pressure takes various forms and long ago turned into a hybrid war against Russia.

Second is the complete disregard for the lawful security interests of our country. Our opponents are doing everything to convince the international community that Russia has no such interests, nor any right to defend them or, therefore, to take any action on this account. As you see, this situation is absurd.

Thirdly, over the course of several years, contrary to objective reality and sometimes common sense, NATO has been humouring the revanchist intentions of the authorities in Kyiv. It is doing this not only in the form of loud political statements peppered with anti-Russian rhetoric, but also through real, very large-scale military and technical cooperation between NATO, its individual members and the regime in Kyiv. Recently this cooperation has taken on a more anti-Russian slant and has been expressed in increasing arms supplies and pledges of the support of military forces if anything happens. In this connection, I note that there have already been reports of the Ukrainian Armed Forces using some arms received from NATO countries.

Fourth is the long-term disregard of Russian initiatives to lower and de-escalate tension along the line of contact with NATO.

This list of causes could go on and on, but it is already clear from this enumeration that the current alarming security situation in Europe is, to put it mildly, the fruit of the

consistent, deliberate anti-Russian course pursued for many years by the North Atlantic Alliance. This course strongly contrasts with Russia's policy aimed at building a constructive dialogue with all countries in order to solve pressing security issues through political and diplomatic means.

I would like to reply separately to the latest anti-Russian invective from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine. Ms. Filipenko has again indulged in a whole series of unfounded and absurd accusations which ring out with enviable zeal and well-oiled regularity from the representatives of Ukraine in various multilateral forums. It seems that, instead of a thoughtful, diligent diplomatic approach to solving the whole range of problems that has built up in Ukraine since the unlawful coup directed against the State and, as events have shown, against the people, in Kyiv in 2014, the Ukrainian authorities prefer to arrange dubious touring propaganda shows by their emissaries.

Such statements merely confirm the inability of the authorities in Kyiv to conduct a critical, objective and level-headed analysis of the situation in and around Ukraine. The aim of such escapades is plainly to conceal or justify the inability and unwillingness of the leadership of Ukraine to solve its domestic problems, to take real steps to sort out the situation in the south-east of the country and to honour all its obligations under the Minsk agreements. By the way, I would point out that Russia is not a party to those agreements, as is made out by our dishonest opponents, but is only one of the guarantors of their implementation.

And, of course, with the help of such statements, a clumsy attempt is being made to evade any responsibility for what has been happening in Ukraine since 2014. As we see it, in the current circumstances, all that Kyiv can do is to hunt elsewhere for people to blame for its own incompetence, thereby condoning its own misjudgment and the inhumane, anti-people policy directed against a large part of its citizens.

One can only regret the shortsightedness, blinkered vision and aggressivity of the Ukrainian authorities and hope that, in the end, common sense and a desire to live a normal life within the country and to establish good, mutually beneficial relations with neighbouring States will prevail in Kyiv and that they will take genuine steps to settle the whole nexus of problems in and around Ukraine, which will take the heat out of the situation and promote greater European security.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for its reply. I see no other requests for the floor. The representative of Ukraine has requested the floor in exercise of the right of reply.

**Mr. Kapustin** (Ukraine): Thank you, Mr. President. Ukraine would like to make a statement during the next plenary meeting in exercise of the right of reply.

**The President** (*spoke in Chinese*): Very well, the President and the secretariat have taken note of the request of the representative of Ukraine and, as there are no other requests for the floor, I would like to share with you some more personal thoughts before we conclude today's meeting.

First of all, I would like to thank all the delegations for their strong support for the President at today's meeting, including their congratulations on the progress we have made on the issue of the participation of non-member States in the work of the Conference. I truly believe that this achievement is the result of our joint efforts. I hope that such a spirit of genuine multilateralism will continue to mark our work and the performance of our duties not only in Geneva, but also in New York, Vienna and other parts of the world. Through our own efforts, let us build confidence in genuine multilateralism. At the conclusion of today's meeting, we will be halfway through the Chinese presidency of the Conference. I would like to share with you some thoughts on the next two weeks' work.

In the past two weeks, as Conference President, I have entered into preliminary discussions with many member States, in the context of bilateral or multilateral consultations. In the course of the Conference's activities, three formal plenary meetings have so far been held. I have listened carefully to the views expressed by member States in the plenary on the work of the Conference, as well as on the programme of work and other matters. With regard to the programme of work, I have noted that it is the common desire of all member States to make substantive progress in the work of the Conference, and that the important role played

by the subsidiary bodies in this regard has been recognized by all. What I have in mind is the question of whether we will be able to commit ourselves to this year's programme of work, which will focus on the most essential elements conducive to substantive work, namely, the establishment of subsidiary bodies to carry out substantive work in a comprehensive and balanced manner, in accordance with the Conference's agenda. In this process, we must of course bear in mind the basic mandate of the Conference. I am working within the group of the six Presidents of this session to prepare a draft and will try to circulate it to you as soon as possible so that we can have a more in-depth discussion around the programme of work at next week's meeting.

At the same time, many colleagues have also mentioned gender issues in their statements in the three meetings of the Conference, and some have also raised this issue today. As President, I have the responsibility to carry out the necessary communication with member States so that together we can find feasible solutions. In my view, the member States of the Conference on Disarmament had a thorough exchange of views on this issue last year, through formal meetings, such as in the plenary. Therefore, I do not intend, nor do I think it necessary, to continue that discussion in the plenary meetings; my efforts in this regard as President will be carried out first through informal consultations. I think sometimes that quiet diplomacy may be more effective than public debate. I hope you will continue to support me in my work.

If there are no other requests for the floor, that concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 8 February. This meeting is adjourned.

*The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.*