
Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 18 September 2020, at 3.15 p.m.

President: Mr. Yury Ambrazevich (Belarus)



The President (*spoke in Russian*): I call to order the 1547th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to inform you that, after the provisional adoption of most of the paragraphs of the draft final report at our last meeting, on 16 September, the Belarusian presidency held additional consultations with the member States. The outcome of these consultations was a revised draft, which was circulated this morning by the secretariat under document symbol CD/WP.629/Rev.5.

This version incorporates the following changes to the version we considered together on Wednesday: the first concerns the numbering of the appendices, their page layout and the addition of headings for appendices I and II; the second is the submission by the secretariat of appendix III, which contains a list of the documents that have been submitted to the secretariat up to and including this morning, 18 September 2020.

At the plenary meeting on Wednesday, we provisionally adopted all the paragraphs except numbers 4 and 5. In the circulated version, you will see a text that was adopted yesterday by all the delegations present in the Chamber during the informal afternoon discussions. Therefore, I propose that we first provisionally adopt these two paragraphs, then adopt the appendices and finally consider whether to adopt the annual report as a whole in accordance with rule 46 of the rules of procedure. The delegations that wish to make any other comments will then have the opportunity to take the floor. I hope that you will support the proposed course of action and, if I see no objections, I suggest that the Conference consider paragraphs 4 and 5, as they appear in document CD/WP.629/Rev.5, circulated this morning by the secretariat.

Would any delegation like to comment on paragraphs 4 and 5? I think it would make sense to consider appendix I at the same time, as an integral part of paragraph 4. I see no one wishing to take the floor. Thank you, distinguished colleagues, for your support. Paragraphs 4 and 5 and appendix I are therefore provisionally adopted.

I would like to draw your attention to appendix II to the draft report. Does anyone wish to comment? I do not see any delegations requesting the floor. I thank you for your support. Appendix II is also provisionally adopted.

Distinguished colleagues, I have been informed that appendix III, in its current form, includes all the documents that had been submitted for the 2020 session by this morning. However, the secretariat has just informed me that additional documents have been submitted – specifically, this morning, after this version of the report had already been produced and circulated, the Russian Federation submitted comments by the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the situation surrounding Alexei Navalny. The symbol and title of this document will be reflected in appendix III to the report in due form and in line with standard practice. This is the only document the secretariat is currently aware of that will be added to the list in appendix III.

In this regard, I would like to invite anyone who intends to submit a document to provide the secretariat or the presidency with the relevant information as quickly as possible and to add the documents before the adoption of our report. Do any delegations wish to declare their intention to include documents? I see that the delegation of Germany has asked for the floor. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you for convening this hopefully short meeting this afternoon. We have not seen this document that has been submitted by the Russian delegation yet. Can I just ask whether it has already been circulated? And before we close business on this year's agenda and finally adopt the report and its annexes, I would at least like to have the opportunity to read the Russian document. I would also like to be given sufficient time to do that, depending on the length of the document.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Germany. Thank you for your question, Ambassador. I give the floor to the Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament for comments.

Ms. Day (Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): Thank you, Mr. President. This is not a comment so much as an additional piece of information: just now we have

received by hand, another practice by delegations, another request for the circulation of a document, this time from the Islamic Republic of Iran. We continue to receive documents and we process and circulate them as fast as we can, but we are continually receiving documents, so it will be a moment.

The President: After these short consultations with the secretariat, I am told that the secretariat will be ready to circulate advance copies of this document in electronic form, very shortly if I understand correctly, so it is to be hoped that this will not prevent us from adopting the report.

(spoke in Russian)

Distinguished colleagues, are there any more questions or comments? There are not.

In view of the query we have received about the documents, I would nonetheless put the question to you and propose that we move to the official adoption of the report. Can we proceed thus or are there any objections? Germany, you have the floor.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. I am sorry to take the floor again. I had requested that I be given time at least to have a look at the document circulated this morning by the Russian Federation before we finally adopt the report. I apologize that this will mean that there may need to be a short recess, but I feel, under the circumstances, a little uneasy about closing this year's session without having had at least the opportunity to read what the Russian Federation has submitted to the Conference on Disarmament. I am not trying to be difficult – I just ask for your indulgence. The document has now been circulated, so I suspect it will not take long.

The President *(spoke in Russian)*: Thank you to the delegation of Germany, Ambassador. I give the floor to the delegation of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. Without wanting to prolong this discussion, I just want to recall the position that my delegation took at our last meeting, which is that, in principle, any delegation can ask for a document to be circulated as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament until the end of the session, which is at 6 o'clock this evening. I would not want to prejudice the right of any delegation to lodge any further documents by 6 p.m., whether the documents have been read or not. That being the case, I think we can all trust that the secretariat will faithfully reproduce the list of the documents received by 6 p.m. in the final version of the report that is published. Thank you.

The President *(spoke in Russian)*: I thank the United Kingdom, and I would like to make a short remark, addressed first and foremost to the Ambassador of Germany, to point out that the document submitted by the Russian Federation is in Russian. Will a copy in Russian be sufficient for you for the moment? I initially thought that that was obvious, but I was wrong not to have mentioned it.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you for that clarification. In that case, I am happy to adopt the report and, yes, of course, I am fully aware, as my United Kingdom colleague has said, that any delegation can submit any document and ask for it to be circulated as an official document until the end of the session. From our point of view, we can proceed.

The President *(spoke in Russian)*: Thank you, Ambassador. The delegation of Cuba has the floor.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Thank you for giving us the floor, Mr. President. My delegation is in complete agreement with the position taken by the United Kingdom and the other delegations (which, moreover, is in line with the rules of procedure): there should be no prejudice to the right of any delegation to submit any document. However, while this is certainly a right, it should in no way be confused with the point that the report cannot be changed once we adopt it.

My delegation has been clear with respect to its interpretation of how rule 46 should be applied. While all delegations have the right to submit any document they wish until 6 p.m. – a logical right that my delegation takes no issue with – we do believe that a report cannot be modified once the Conference on Disarmament has adopted it. It seems to my

delegation that we would be disrespecting ourselves somewhat if we were to adopt a document that could then be changed. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished delegation of Cuba, with all due respect for your national opinion, I think we are going back over previous ground with discussions about when and how the period in which documents can be submitted ends and what an approved report looks like. Your comments and the comments made by the delegation of the United Kingdom seem to be diametrically opposed, and, given the discussion that took place last time, it is hard to believe that we will reach a consensus on this issue. In this regard, I would once again like to ask all the delegations about their intentions with respect to documents and whether they are willing to adopt the document – our report – on the understanding that documents, in line with the rules of procedure, can be submitted until 6 p.m. today. I give the floor to the delegation of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. It is not at all our intention to prolong this meeting. However, we would unquestionably be adopting a practice here that is contrary to the most basic operating principles of any organization and even the most basic principles of logic. I would respectfully disagree with your comment, as I really see no contradiction between the observation of the United Kingdom on rule 45, which gives States the right to submit documents, and the terms of rule 46, which says that the Conference on Disarmament has to adopt a report. I do not find it logical to be able to change a report that we have already adopted, as the report subsequently presented to the First Committee would not be the report we adopted at this meeting. It is purely a question of legal formality.

I want to be as flexible as possible, and we really have no issue with any of the documents – in fact, I think it would be very difficult for anyone to take issue with a State's submitting the document that it wishes – but it remains clear that, for procedural reasons, and if we are to take our work seriously, a report that the member States have adopted cannot be presented to the First Committee if it has been changed after adoption. Such a situation would be unacceptable and is something I have never encountered in any type of meeting. I do not wish to begin a debate on the issue or the rules; it is simply a matter of logic.

If we adopt a document with 4,200 words, that document, not one that has 4,210 words because it later had to be changed, is the adopted document. My delegation is perfectly willing to meet at 5.55 p.m., see what the document is and adopt the report. But it is out of respect for our work that my delegation cannot adopt something knowing that it will later be changed by the secretariat. Nowhere do the rules of procedure say that the secretariat has the power to change the rules we have adopted. I do not believe that there is any contradiction whatsoever between what I am saying and the statement of principle made by the delegation of the United Kingdom on member States' rights under rule 45; nor do I believe, at least on the basis of what I have heard, that anyone here is suggesting that rule 46 can be violated, as the first sentence of rule 46 is quite clear when it says that the States have to adopt the report. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Cuba. Before I give the floor to the delegation of the United Kingdom, I would like to ask the Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament for a comment on current practice. Then I will put my question to you all: are we ready to work?

Ms. Day (Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): I think there was a misunderstanding. The practice was clear from the previous plenary meeting. We have accepted documents with requests that they be included in the report up to the close of the session. The practice is clear, then, but it is also true that the rules of procedure do not specify the details on this, so if the Conference on Disarmament decides to depart from this practice, that is its prerogative. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you.

(*spoke in English*)

The delegation of the United Kingdom has the floor.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. I was going to make a similar point to the one our Secretary has made, which is that in the two years that the delegate of Cuba and I have been sitting together in the Conference on Disarmament, he has been quite happy, as have I, to follow the procedure that the Secretary has just outlined without apparently worrying about how logical it is. Our predecessors have done the same for the previous ten years or more, as our Secretary informed us at our last plenary meeting. I do not understand what has changed – perhaps our colleague could enlighten us. But it is also the case that in every other disarmament forum, when we adopt a report, the secretariat then updates it in an editorial, technical fashion to, for example, list the States parties that have taken the floor in a particular debate or participated in the meeting or indeed to add further documents. This is perfectly standard practice in this and every other forum that we deal with. I do not understand what has changed, and particularly not in the last meeting of the session, just as we are about to adopt the report.

I am the first to admit that we need to have an examination of the working methods of this Conference. We have proposed in the past having a coordinator to consult delegations on this, and this is precisely the reason why we have suggested that. But this is not the time or the place to be having this debate or altering our past practice, which we have been perfectly happy with for ten years. I do not understand why we need to change it now.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I give the floor to the delegation of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Mr. President, thank you very much. I am following this debate very carefully, and I believe that both sides are correct. In fact, the Ambassador of the United Kingdom is correct in his own way, but the delegate of Cuba is also not wrong. I think these difficulties arise because of the way we interpret rule 46 of the rules of procedure. The normal practice is that when our report is adopted, that session and all of the meetings normally end. It is also true that sometimes we adopt reports with the understanding that the secretariat will add the documents – for example, the list of speakers – and I have also seen where the Presidents or the Chairs have said that they would be adding the Chair's summary or the President's summary to the report, albeit with the consent of the participating member States.

In this particular case, the difficulty arises because we might be adopting the report at 4 p.m. or 5 p.m., as the case may be, but the Conference on Disarmament session will come to an end at 6 p.m. And perhaps that is the difficulty we are confronted with here.

Ideally, after a report is adopted, it cannot be changed, except to make editorial or any other changes if the Conference so decides. In this particular case, I believe the Conference is not ready to accept any changes after the adoption of the report. Now, the Ambassador of the United Kingdom refers to rule 45 (f), which says “working papers and proposals submitted during the year”. But the chapeau also states: “the drafts [that is, the draft reports] shall contain.”

Rule 46 actually establishes a finality when it says that “the Conference shall adopt the annual report at the end of its session”. That means those drafts become the final report. And that happens at the end of the session, so I believe the delegate of Cuba is correct if he does not want to follow past practice, because it is not mentioned anywhere in the rules of procedure that we have to follow practices. We have to follow the rules of procedure.

The Ambassador of the United Kingdom also asked what has changed. I believe the response was given by the delegate of Syria the other day, when she referred to an issue in 2018, when a document was submitted late and created some difficulty. The Conference has to find a way: either we all agree that we adopt the report with no changes other than editorial changes by the technical secretariat or we wait until 6 p.m. and then adopt the report. That would take care of all the positions in this room. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Ambassador. I have the impression that your ability to speak Russian lets you read my mind. I would rather the Conference on Disarmament not get dragged into debates on this matter and thus propose either that we come to a gentleman's agreement here in this chamber – namely, that we accept two additional documents, one from the Russian Federation and the other from the Islamic Republic of Iran, as we consider the report and confirm that there will be no more documents

– or that we now move on to the general debate and return to the adoption of the report at 5.55 p.m. Please start by considering the first option. Germany, please, and then Cuba.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. A comment and a question. The comment is as follows: my delegation is now in a situation in which a document will become part of the official record of this year's cycle without my delegation's actually knowing what is in the document, because I do not read Russian. That is not a good situation. And then to be asked to forgo the possibility of responding to such a document in this session is something I feel very uncomfortable with, even though I do not know whether there will be a need to respond.

My question is: what will happen to a document – or what happened to such a document in the past? – that is submitted to the secretariat for circulation as an official document after the end of the last meeting in a given session but before, say, 6 p.m.? How would you record this as an official document? My interpretation of the rules of procedure is exactly the interpretation of my Indian colleague. Once the final plenary meeting ends with the adoption of the report, the session of the Conference on Disarmament of that particular year has ended.

I would think that any document that is sent to the secretariat afterwards could be reflected in the session of the following year. I could thus accept your first option on the proviso that I have the chance to be told what this Russian document contains. There are Russian speakers here – interpreters or whoever – who can provide me with this information. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of Germany. While we think of a way to grant your request, to respond to it, I will give the floor to the delegation of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I would also like to thank our colleagues for the interesting discussion that we are having. This might be a flaw of mine – a flaw that I, as a lawyer, think almost all lawyers have – but I like to be in compliance with the rules. I have no problem with the gentleman's agreement that you are proposing. For the rest, a standard practice is neither a rule nor consensus. I believe that responds to everything that has been said here. I also agree that the session of the Conference on Disarmament comes to an end when the last plenary meeting of the Conference ends – the key point. Right now, I could, as a capricious lawyer, say that 18 September ends not at 6 p.m. but at midnight, and the United Nations Interpretation Service could be asked to stay with us until then. That would obviously be terrible, and I am the first to say so because I have no objection to the documents being submitted.

What I would like to convey is that how we interpret the rules of procedure obviously has to be in our interest. I believe that if the Conference adopts a report and gives the secretariat the green light to add to it, the secretariat can do so. But if there is a doubt as to something that happened in the past that we do not want to have repeated, I fully understand what the distinguished representative of Germany is saying. It is his right. He clearly wants to know whether or not he will have to respond to the document and what it says.

We are extremely flexible. We have no issue with the gentleman's agreement. What we do not want, however, is for it to be considered standard practice to change a document adopted by the member States without the consent of the member States. This cannot be standard practice, and Cuba would never accept it as standard practice.

Otherwise, Mr. President, I am entirely in your hands and those of the parties concerned. Cuba has no special interest in this case other than that the rules be followed. If the solution is a gentleman's agreement, we will accept it. If the German delegation needs time to review the document and make a decision, there as well we are flexible. If we have to meet at 6 p.m., then we will be here at 6 p.m. But what we are not flexible on is the view that it is standard practice for a document that we adopt to be changed once it is out of our hands. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Dear colleagues, we can continue this discussion while we try to help the German Ambassador learn what is in the Russian document. The delegation of India has the floor.

Mr. Sharma (India): Thank you, Ambassador. My delegation is quite flexible. It can go with either of the options as long as you call it a “gentlepersons’ agreement”, because India supported amending the rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, India. I give the floor to the delegation of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President. I take the floor just to add that if there are new documents which are not translated into English, I also would like to see them. They should be readable for everybody.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you for your comment, Ambassador. According to the information we have just received from the secretariat, the secretariat is not able to formally grant this request at this stage and is not mandated to provide translation services. The interpreters we work with have another role and are currently in the booths. The only way out of this situation is to ask the delegation that submitted the document or to follow the example of your German colleague. I give the floor to the Russian Federation.

Ms. Kuznetsova (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Mr. President. When my delegation submitted the document, only the Russian version existed. An English version has now been published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I can share a link to the English translation.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now ask the delegations concerned: is that response from the delegation of the Russian Federation satisfactory? I give the floor to the Ambassador of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. I have just been given an English version of the document by your colleague. May I therefore again just request a very short recess so that I have the opportunity to read the document. Reading the document and following the discussion is a little difficult. It will not take much time.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you for your proposal, Ambassador. I give the floor to the delegation of the Netherlands. Please go ahead, Ambassador.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): I thank Russia for this information. If there is an English text available, then, can it be circulated by the secretariat? Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, in response to the request for a short recess, the meeting will be suspended for 10 minutes.

The meeting was suspended at 4 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Colleagues, I would like to inform you that the secretariat has just circulated links to electronic versions, in English, of two provisional documents – neither has a symbol or is registered as a document of the Conference on Disarmament – one the document of the Russian Federation and the other the document of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Hard copies of the document of the Russian Federation are currently being printed and will be placed on the table by the wall at the back of the Chamber for those who would like to read the statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in traditional paper format.

I am once again compelled to return to my proposal for a mutual agreement, gentlemanly or not, to adopt the report now, on the understanding that there will or will not be more documents; if, however, you intend to submit any additional documents, please inform us all now. If no one has any such intention, we will need to turn to the political debates and move the adoption of the report to 5.55 p.m. I give the floor to the delegation of Israel.

Ms. Maayan (Israel): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. I would like to reserve the right to submit a document later on. We will produce all the necessary documents, including a note verbale, but I need a few more minutes to discuss matters with my Ambassador and come back to you on that. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Israel. Are there any other delegations that would like to exercise their right to comment on this matter? Considering the Israeli

delegation's stated intention, as I understand it, to submit its own document today before the end of the session, are there any objections to our proceeding to the adoption of the report on the session? There are no objections.

Distinguished colleagues, on the understanding that we have been informed by the delegation of Israel that it may submit an additional document, which will become part of the report, even if we adopt it in three minutes' time, I invite you all to consider document CD/WP.629/Rev.5 of the Conference on Disarmament as a whole. This text is a draft report of the Conference on its 2020 session. Adopting it will allow us to fulfil our obligations under rule 46 of the Conference's rules of procedure.

I now invite you to officially adopt the report to the General Assembly in the version currently before you. Does any delegation wish to take the floor to comment on this matter? I see no requests for the floor. May I take it that, since there are no objections, this report is fully adopted?

It was so decided.

I congratulate you on the adoption of the report on the Conference's work in 2020. Distinguished colleagues, do any delegations wish to take the floor during the remainder of our formal plenary meeting? I give the floor to the delegation that requested it first, the delegation of Belgium on behalf of next year's six Presidents.

Ms. Marchand (Belgium): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, let me congratulate you for the adoption of our final report and express to you my delegation's appreciation for your dedication and constructive leadership throughout this process.

Mr. President, on behalf of the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament – Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chile and my own country – I would like to share with you some of our thinking going into next year.

First, we applaud the group of the six Presidents of 2020 for its innovative and collaborative approach to the Conference on Disarmament's activities this year. While the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) derailed part of our session, the group of Presidents of 2020 still provided more consistency and coherence to the year than many of us had previously experienced. In a body composed of 65 members, broken into four regional groups, it is to be welcomed that six delegations could work cross-regionally to one purpose, getting the Conference back to work on matters of substance. Like the group of Presidents of 2020, we see our presidencies as an ensemble, rather than six solo acts. Of course, we will bring our own experiences and perspectives to bear in terms of how we will deliver on the 2021 session. The Conference needs to provide a space for meaningful discussion and exchange on its agenda items and other salient issues in order to see progress on disarmament.

We wish to see this body return to negotiations, although we recognize the nature of the challenges facing the Conference in recent years. Nonetheless, we will seek to be ambitious where we can be, as well as practical and pragmatic. We hope that all delegations will take a similar approach to 2021, one grounded in a clear understanding of national interest but open to the possibility of progress, ready to consider alternate approaches and fuelled by a desire to see the Conference fully accomplish its mandate of helping make the world safer and more secure. It is in all our interests. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the representative of Belgium. Distinguished colleagues, are there any further requests for the floor? I give the floor to the delegation of Germany.

Mr. Bouzias (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. We congratulate Belarus on assuming the last presidency of the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament. We thank you and the other members of the group of the year's six Presidents – Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria and Bangladesh – for all your endeavours. In particular, I would like to thank you for presenting the Conference's annual report for adoption and to put on record the following position.

The European Union continues to actively support the enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament, which currently has only 65 members. Since the last expansion in 2002, 27 countries, including 12 European Union member States, have been waiting to become

Conference members, and the number of observer States is growing each year, reaching a new long-term high in 2019. We would like to reiterate our proposal that a special coordinator be appointed to lead substantive consultations and to lay out possible scenarios for the consideration of Conference on Disarmament members on the long-overdue expansion of membership.

Although we joined consensus on paragraph 11 of the Conference's annual report, we deeply regret that one Conference member blocked the observership request of Cyprus, contrary to the practice for the last twenty-two years. We would like to remind all delegations that Cyprus applied for full membership and had been invited to participate at the Conference until January 2020. Furthermore, we are of the view that a neutral, non-controversial and factual reference, as included in the initial draft of the report, which reads "the Conference also considered a request for participation from Cyprus" would find its place in the report. Yet, again, this reference, based on the fact that the Conference discussed and made a decision on Cyprus's observership request and a number of compromise proposals, was rejected by the same member of the Conference. In this regard, we are deeply concerned not only about the development in the Conference during the 2020 session but also about the unconstructive approach towards negotiation of the report.

In conclusion, we strongly urge the Conference member concerned to reconsider its position and to join consensus on the list of observers during the 2021 session. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Germany, speaking on behalf of the European Union. I give the floor to the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela congratulates you on your transparent and inclusive leadership and the skilful manner with which you have guided the member States towards consensus. We also thank the secretariat for the technical support it has provided.

Mr. President, my country would like to make some comments in light of the report, now adopted, on this session of the Conference on Disarmament, which will be presented to the General Assembly. This report substantially corrects the inequity of recent years. The member States of the Conference should ensure that, in the future, reports always include references to the six presidencies of the year and that the inclusion of this reference does not depend on the whims of one delegation.

We believe that the principles and procedures of the United Nations should be respected as guidelines for multilateral diplomacy and that, consequently, the presidencies of all States are entitled to equal treatment.

Mr. President, all States Members of the United Nations have the right to participate in the Conference as observers. Our country has expressed its support for expanding the Conference's membership. In 2019, my delegation found it deeply regrettable that the delegation of the United States objected to the request of the State of Palestine to participate in our Conference. Given the precedent set by the United States in this forum, the comments of the delegation of Turkey are not without justification.

A spirit of fairness in the discussion of all the issues before the Conference should guide our collective and mutually supportive efforts, particularly at a time when the standstill at which the Conference finds itself has been made more intractable by the collapse of major agreements on international security, disarmament and arms control.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela hopes that in the years to come the efforts to adopt the report of the Conference will serve as an example of the flexibility and responsibility of all member States. We hope that a programme of work with a negotiating mandate will be adopted very soon. We therefore call on all member States of the Conference to pay sincere attention to latent international security issues, including nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Thank you very much, Mr. President, and congratulations on your work.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you for your kind words for the Belarusian presidency. I give the floor to the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation greatly appreciates the excellent work carried out and enormous efforts made by you and your team to enable us to reach final agreement on the annual report. In this regard, I would like to sincerely congratulate you on your successful conclusion of the last presidency of the Conference on Disarmament this year. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you for your kind words for the presidency. Austria, you have the floor.

Mr. Müller (Austria): Thank you. Mr. President, 2020 has been a year full of unexpected challenges for all of us. Multilateralism and respect for a rules-based international order remain in crisis. Looking back at my membership of the outgoing group of the year's six Presidents, I nevertheless have to say that it was all the more encouraging to see that when there was the opportunity, Conference on Disarmament members were ready to restart meetings. They demonstrated respect for the body and its important agenda. Given the difficult overall circumstances of the pandemic – but also within our particular dossier – it was heartening to see assurances of flexibility be put into action as we organized the first plenary meeting after the pause. It would not have been possible if each and every State represented here had not taken the decision to let pragmatism prevail. I would like to thank delegations for their efforts, flexibility and commitment. It leaves me with the positive conclusion that where there is a will there is a way.

Much of this sentiment relates to the readiness for dialogue and cooperation even in difficult circumstances. Dialogue and cooperation have also been the leading principle of the efforts of the group of the six Presidents. I would like to thank the fellow countries that were members of the group – Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh and Belarus – for the extraordinary multilateral teamwork. This group from different regions and sometimes different areas of focus within the disarmament agenda worked together in the spirit of serving the Conference. Austria is pleased that the six Presidents for 2021 decided to follow this practice and are already in close contact with each other. The statement we just heard on that group's behalf from Belgium attests to their determination to move the Conference forward. I can already flag here now our support for their endeavour. Cooperation among the Presidents will of course not solve all the pending issues in this chamber, but it certainly can contribute to overcoming them.

As the 2020 session comes to a close, I feel encouraged that most delegations in this room share this spirit of constructiveness and focus on substance, rather than bilateral issues beyond the mandate of the Conference. Unfortunately, not all delegations follow this path.

Mr. President, disarmament concerns the security of all States. All countries have a stake in it. We continue to think that all United Nations Member States should be able to participate in the multilateral forums that are relevant to their interest. Dialogue is the basis of diplomacy. We see consensus as a means of protecting vital ultimate security interests, not of preventing dialogue and preliminary exchanges. Therefore, we hope that in the future the principle of openness of the Conference will prevail, so that the Conference does not isolate itself from other multilateral disarmament forums.

On a more personal note, I wish to conclude by encouraging all members of the Conference to dare to think outside the box. Challenges come with opportunities. In the midst of a pandemic, I believe we have the opportunity to think about how the Conference could be more effective in addressing its important agenda. Our guiding idea should be to finally get back to fulfilling this body's mandate. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Ambassador of Austria. I give the floor to the delegation of Algeria.

Mr. Berkat (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, my delegation wishes to congratulate you on the success of your presidency and on your tireless efforts to reach consensus on the final report of the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament. We appreciate the constructive spirit shown by everyone who contributed to this achievement, despite the difficulties related to some paragraphs. The voice of reason and the wisdom of

silence displayed by some members in the public interest does not mean that the various viewpoints have been abandoned, but rather reflects a commitment to a constructive approach in order to enhance the spirit of consensus and advance the Conference's work in accordance with its rules of procedure.

While we appreciate the exceptional circumstances that the Conference experienced this year as a result of the coronavirus disease pandemic, we believe that the technical and procedural nature of the final report dictated by these circumstances should not overshadow or obscure the enormous collective efforts made throughout the ordinary and extraordinary parts of this session by the six presidencies, member States and regional groups. In this context, we should recall the dynamism, positivity and sense of responsibility that marked the beginning of the work of this session, as well as the tireless efforts made during the exceptional period of the session, all of which demonstrated the commitment of member States to this forum and their endeavours to preserve its effectiveness and credibility.

My country had the honour of contributing to the strong start of the session by working to establish an atmosphere of confidence and positivity, adopting the language of dialogue and consultation and taking advantage of the mechanisms provided by the Conference's rules of procedure and recognized practices, as well as the successful experiences involving decisions approved by consensus and recent proposals and initiatives. In this context, the Algerian presidency of the Conference spared no effort in trying to bridge views and overcome the difficulties faced over the course of the eight general meetings that it was able to hold, as well as the nearly 200 informal consultative meetings held during the preparatory period and throughout its presidency. In this regard, I would like to express appreciation to the delegations that showed flexibility and a high level of professionalism and that took bold decisions to facilitate consensus.

Within the framework of the collective efforts of the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, my country sought to transform our shared hopes into a reality that brought us closer to the imminent adoption of a package of important decisions that would add new and renewed vitality to the work of the Conference and usher in a new era that would return the Conference on Disarmament to its role as the sole negotiating forum in the field of disarmament. In this regard, I would like to reiterate my country's appreciation for the support it received when it assumed the presidency of the Conference and to commend the efforts of all members. I also valued very highly the team spirit of the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session. This mechanism highlighted the importance of complementarity and synergy as real drivers of endeavours aimed at achieving common goals.

Drawing positive lessons from the current session at this particular time, especially with regard to the effectiveness of the diplomatic and collective approach and the language of dialogue and consultation in a positive atmosphere of trust and joint action, would motivate us all to maintain this trust and team work for the sake of coherence and synergy of efforts during the next session. We look forward to working with the six Presidents of the 2021 session to complete the work of the Conference with the success that we all desire. Before concluding, I would like to thank all those people who have striven to ensure that the work of our Conference was able to run smoothly: the officials of the secretariat and the interpreters, who are to be highly commended for all the efforts they have made. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Radha Day on her appointment to her new post. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Algeria. I give the floor to the delegation of Greece.

Mr. Sitaras (Greece): Thank you, Mr. President, and congratulations for your efforts, which have led to the adoption of this report. Greece would like to fully align itself with the statement made by the European Union on the issue of Cyprus in paragraph 11 of the report.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Greece. I give the floor to the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. We appreciate all your efforts to arrange the informal consultations in order to finalize the draft report on the

2020 session. My delegation would also like to thank the Presidents of the 2020 session and the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament for all their efforts. As we are ending our 2020 session, Mr. President, it is disappointing that this year's Conference was again not able to break its long stalemate due to the lack of political will, the lack of a sense of responsibility and the lack of firm conviction in serving current and future generations by moving towards a world free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

Of course, these are the consequences of the tremendous "spoiler" approach taken by the malign actor that has been doing everything to distract the Conference from its core mandate and occupy this august body with procedural issues instead of substantial and meaningful negotiations on legally binding instruments, nuclear disarmament or negative security assurances. All of us have witnessed that the Conference has spent almost four weeks just on how to mention the names of the Presidents of the 2020 session, against almost four decades of precedent. Instead, we could have invested that time and energy negotiating the elements of legally binding instruments on the four core issues of the Conference mandate, in particular nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, we are of the view that the best practice is to mention the names of the Conference members that serve as the Presidents for the Conference session each year. We do hope that all Conference members that value the rule of law, order based on international law and multilateralism will demand the political will to advance and fulfil the mandate of the Conference by adopting a comprehensive, balanced and inclusive programme of work on the four core issues in next year's session, in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President.

The Chinese delegation congratulates Belarus on its success in performing the tasks of the presidency and thanks you, your team and the Conference on Disarmament secretariat for your unremitting efforts to push all parties to adopt a report on the work of the Conference.

This year, against the backdrop of the special international situation and the COVID-19 pandemic, the members of the Conference overcame practical difficulties and, with the strong support of the Conference secretariat, did their best to carry out their work and finally successfully adopt our report. This in itself is a concrete manifestation of the commitment of the Conference's member States to support multilateralism and international solidarity and cooperation. China is looking forward to working with other parties to successfully draw up a draft resolution on the work of the Conference in the First Committee of the General Assembly on the basis of today's report on our work. We shall stand ready to continue next year to push the Conference to carry out substantive work. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you for your kind words, Ambassador. I give the floor to the delegation of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, my delegation would like to congratulate Belarus on the tireless efforts it has made to ensure the adoption of the final report of the Conference on Disarmament, which will be submitted to the First Committee, and all the members of the Conference on their professionalism and flexibility, which allowed this session of the Conference to be brought to a successful conclusion. We also thank the secretariat for its valuable support during the 2020 session.

Mr. President, my delegation would like to express its immense satisfaction with the joint efforts that my country, together with the other countries holding the presidencies in the 2020 session (Algeria, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh and Belarus), was able to make despite the enormous obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the coordination activities of the group of the 2020 session's six Presidents. We would like to encourage the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference (Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada and Chile) to continue with this constructive joint working mechanism.

We welcome the joint statement made today by the six Presidents of the 2021 session and note that it demonstrates that those delegations are already beginning to work jointly. I

would like to convey my delegation's willingness to work and share its experiences with the Presidents of the next session and its interest in doing so.

Finally, my delegation would like to call for the resumption of the substantive work of the Conference and hopes that a substantive report can be adopted in 2021. Thank you very much, Mr. President, and congratulations on your work.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Argentina. I give the floor to the delegation of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Choi (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Mr. President. I will be brief. I would like to join the previous speakers in thanking you and your team, along with the Conference on Disarmament secretariat. Your leadership and patience have led us through these tough four weeks so as to finally be able to adopt this consensus report this year and carry on our tradition.

While expectations for a fresh start this year were high, particularly with the coordination mechanism in place involving the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, we have had yet another disappointing year in the end. To break through the impasse and bring the Conference back to its proper place, we need a practical, flexible and realistic approach. We could consider further narrowing down the list of agenda items, focusing on pressing items to promote the Conference's effectiveness and relevance in addressing current security challenges.

I believe that an open and frank discussion on how to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Conference's way of work would also be helpful in finding ways to re-engineer this important vehicle. In this vein, I hope that next year we can agree on a simple programme of work, as suggested by our colleagues in the Conference, and at least resume the discussion of pressing issues in some form. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you. I give the floor to the delegation of Australia.

Ms. Hill (Australia): Thank you, Mr. President. And can I first add my delegation's voice to those expressing appreciation for your work, Mr. President, on shepherding the Conference on Disarmament report through to adoption this year? Australia was proud to be part of the group of six Presidents this year, and we are pleased that this approach will continue into 2021. We were also pleased that Australia's two working papers, reflecting the work that we undertook during our presidency, were included in the Conference's report. These papers covered, respectively, a summary of our consultations undertaken earlier this year with Conference members and our proposal to make the Conference's rules of procedure gender-neutral.

Many of you had commented to us that the views and the priorities expressed during our consultations would be a good basis for work going forward, and you expressed an interest in our formalizing these consultations into a working paper, which we have done. While it is an Australian paper, done with the support of the group of the year's six Presidents, it does not express Australia's views; rather, it reflects the views and priorities of you, the Conference members. We hope that this paper will be a useful working document for the group of next year's six Presidents to take forward.

We were also pleased by the broad support that we received from delegations for our gender proposal. And in this regard, I would like to note with appreciation the Ambassador of India's helpful earlier intervention on gender-neutral language today. We hope that next year's group of Presidents will be able to make progress on this simple but important technical update to the rules of procedure and thus to demonstrate the importance of diversity and equality to the work of the Conference. Australia stands ready to provide all necessary assistance in this endeavour. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Australia. I give the floor to the delegation of Myanmar.

Ms. Htun (Myanmar): Mr. President, I wish to join other delegations in congratulating you and Belarus on your successful presidency and the adoption of the report.

I also wish to congratulate the year's Presidents for their collaborative efforts in advancing the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Myanmar also thanks the secretariat for its support throughout the 2020 session.

Mr. President, Myanmar deeply appreciates your concerted efforts throughout the process. I commend you and your delegation for your excellent work to reach consensus among the member States by holding several rounds of consultations and revisions to accommodate all the concerns of the member States. We also appreciate the cooperative efforts of other delegations to achieve a successful outcome. The adoption of the report by consensus is of the utmost importance to maintaining the credibility of the Conference. Regardless of the challenges in this difficult time, the Conference, with its unique mandate, remains the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. The prevailing situation of uncertainty and insecurity has made the Conference even more relevant than before.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to inform the Conference that Myanmar, together with like-minded countries, will table the draft resolution on nuclear disarmament again at the forthcoming session, the seventy-fifth, of the United Nations General Assembly. I am grateful to all the member States for their support for the resolution in previous years and wish to request member States to extend their continued support for the successful adoption of the draft resolution this year. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Myanmar. I give the floor to the delegation of Turkey.

Mr. Işlak (Turkey): Dear colleagues, first and foremost I would like to thank all delegations for the constructiveness and flexibility shown for the adoption of the annual report. It is indeed a great achievement of the Conference on Disarmament to adopt its annual report, given the high uncertainty of the pandemic period. The most important goal for the period is to take this achievement to a higher level by reaching a consensus on a programme of work in the 2021 session of the Conference and thus ensure the relevance of the Conference before talking about enlargement of the Conference.

In line with past practice, we actually wanted to keep the agreed language in the relevant paragraph; as all of us have stated, we wanted the Conference's draft report to be as technical and as concise as possible. We believe that we cannot reach that goal if we try to include all issues on which members cannot agree. Although we are not happy with it, for the sake of flexibility and reaching consensus, we accepted the proposal of the European members of the Conference. We need to reiterate all positions about one entity. Everybody should also turn to Turkey because, after two years, we managed to see to it that the names of the countries that assumed the Conference presidency in 2020 appeared in the report. We are fully agreed with the Ambassador of Venezuela: if all members show respect for equality in every issue, then we will do the same.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to once again thank all the delegations of the States that assumed the presidency this year – Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh and Belarus – the coordinators of the subsidiary bodies, all the hard-working members of the staff of the secretariat of the Conference, the interpreters and the technicians. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Turkey. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like also to join the previous speakers in congratulating you for a successful adoption of the report. Japan would like to pay tribute to your painstaking efforts as President, which enabled us to adopt this report.

I also express Japan's great appreciation to each of this year's six Presidents, who have introduced an innovative approach based upon close coordination among the six Presidents to the great benefit of this august body. I think it is also very encouraging to hear the representative of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the incoming group of six Presidents, announce the group's intention to continue this form of coordination. We hope sincerely that the Conference on Disarmament can return to its core mandate next year under their

presidencies and thus show that the Conference remains relevant to the current challenges facing all the world.

Taking advantage of this occasion, I would like to announce that Japan is now finalizing its draft resolution, entitled “Joint courses of action and future-oriented dialogue towards a world without nuclear weapons”, which is to be presented at the seventy-fifth session of the First Committee. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Ambassador. I give the floor to the delegation of Egypt.

Mr. Elsayed (Egypt): Mr. President, allow me to start by thanking and congratulating you for your efforts to garner support for and achieve consensus on the adoption of this year’s report of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation very much appreciates the inclusive and transparent manner in which you have guided our work.

Egypt’s position on the participation of non-member States has been consistent throughout the years. This position emanates from our firm belief that the Conference on Disarmament is a technical body that is mandated with multilateral disarmament negotiations. We believe that the participation of non-member States, especially from regions that are witnessing heightened tensions, would contribute positively to the work of the Conference.

We regret that although Cyprus has been participating annually in the work of the Conference as an observer since 1988, its request was denied this year. We would like to express our support for Cyprus and for its participation in the work of the Conference. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you. The delegation of Cuba has the floor.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Very briefly, my delegation would like to thank the six Presidents of the 2020 session of the Conference on Disarmament for all their efforts and the secretariat for the continuous support that it provides to our work. Our thanks also go to the interpreters who have been with us over these months. The efforts at the beginning of the session to produce a balanced and complete programme of work were commendable, as was the way the following Presidents dealt with the situation created by the pandemic.

We thank you warmly, Mr. President, for the transparent and judicious manner in which you successfully brought our last tasks to completion. To the next six Presidents, we assure you of our complete support, and we assure the Conference that Cuba will continue to demonstrate clear political will in working towards the fulfilment of the Conference’s important mandate: to be the sole multilateral forum for the negotiation of legally binding instruments in the field of disarmament. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the delegation of Cuba for its kind words to the presidency. I give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to join those who have spoken before me in expressing our thanks for your efforts, and those of your diplomatic staff, and for your patience, which has allowed us to reach consensus on the adoption of this year’s report of the Conference on Disarmament to the General Assembly. I would like to pay tribute to your diplomatic skills, the spirit of transparency and the constructive and professional attitude with which you led our work, and to congratulate your friendly country on the success of the presidency of Belarus for the final part of the session, which adds to its important contributions to multilateral diplomacy, especially in the field of disarmament.

Thanks are due to the presidencies of this year’s session and to the secretariat for its efforts.

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about exceptional circumstances that have cast a shadow over the work of the Conference. However, another virus that continues to cast a heavy shadow over our work and deliberations is the virus of excessive politicization that has continued, particularly in recent years, to divert our Conference from its role and mandate as a technical negotiating platform and caused it instead to focus on narrow political

considerations. We look forward to leaving behind this unhealthy atmosphere and to working with the rest of our colleagues during the next session of the Conference to restore the focus of our substantive work based on the items on the agenda and to working seriously to reach a comprehensive and balanced programme of work.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Ambassador. Distinguished colleagues, we have exhausted the list of speakers. Before I officially close the meeting, allow me to thank all of you and your colleagues, the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament, the Secretary-General of the Conference, Ms. Valovaya, the interpreters and the technical specialists for their work, constructive approach and flexibility. I thank you all and will see you at the next session. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.