

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand six hundred and fifteenth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 8 March 2022, at 3.05 p.m.

President: Ms. Alicia Victoria Arango Olmos..... (Colombia)



The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Distinguished colleagues, I would like to begin this plenary meeting by paying tribute to all the women of the world, in particular those struggling every day for a better future for their children; those women who, full of courage and love and despite their circumstances, continue fighting for their rights and against discrimination and to ensure respect for their right to participate everywhere, in every setting. We must stay the course and not give up, nor forget that resolve is one of our characteristics.

I call to order the 1615th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

First of all, I am pleased to welcome those colleagues who have recently taken up their duties representing their Governments in the Conference on Disarmament. On behalf of my Government and of the Conference, I assure you of my full support and cooperation in your roles.

Our work today will proceed as follows: I will begin by asking the Conference to consider the request from Barbados to participate in the work of the Conference this session. I will then present an update on our work. After that, we will hear any comments that member States wish to make regarding the subsidiary groups in anticipation of the meeting that we will hold with the coordinators of the subsidiary groups on Thursday, 10 March, when they will report back to the Conference on the subsidiary groups' progress.

We will then move to an informal meeting, in which we will discuss the importance of including women's perspectives on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. During that meeting, we will present two introductory videos: one from Her Excellency Ms. Marta Lucía Ramírez, Vice-President and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia, and the other from Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations. In addition, three panellists will present their perspectives on the issue to us.

Allow me now to move to our first item: the request of a non-member State of the Conference to participate in our work in the 2022 session. Document [CD/WP.638/Add.2](#) includes the request received by the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament between publication of [CD/WP.638/Add.1](#) and Friday, 4 March at 3 p.m. Any request from a non-member State received after that date will be presented for your consideration and decision at the next plenary meeting.

May I take it that the Conference decides to invite Barbados to participate in our work, in accordance with the rules of procedure? It is so decided. Does any delegation wish to take the floor on this issue at this time? Since none wish to do so, I would like to welcome Barbados as a non-member State to the 2022 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

We will now continue with today's agenda. I give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Göbel (Germany): Madam President, Germany holds the presidency of the Group of Seven this year; we had a meeting of our foreign ministers on Friday, 4 March, in Brussels, following which the foreign ministers issued a joint statement, which I would like to share with the distinguished delegates of the Conference on Disarmament.

We, the Group of Seven Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and the High Representative of the European Union, reiterate our profound condemnation of Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable war of choice against Ukraine, enabled by the Belarusian Government.

Russia must immediately stop its ongoing assault against Ukraine, which has dramatically impacted the civilian population and destroyed civilian infrastructure, and immediately withdraw Russia's military forces. With its further aggression, President Putin has isolated Russia in the world, as evidenced by the overwhelming vote at the United Nations General Assembly condemning Russia's aggression and calling upon it to withdraw its forces immediately.

We express our heartfelt solidarity with the Ukrainian people and our sympathy with the victims of this war and their families. We underline our unwavering support for

Ukraine, its freely elected Government and its brave people at this most difficult time, and express our readiness to assist them further.

We condemn the Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. We call on Russia to uphold its obligation to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights law. Ukrainian and United Nations humanitarian agencies, medical personnel and non-governmental assistance providers must be given safe, rapid and unimpeded access to people in need immediately throughout the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We acknowledge the announcement of an arrangement on humanitarian access as an important first step. This will need to be implemented reliably and swiftly. We commit to increasing humanitarian support as the needs of the Ukrainian people grow due to Russia's aggression. We urge Russia to stop its attacks, especially in the direct vicinity of Ukraine's nuclear power plants. Any armed attack on or threat against nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful purposes constitutes a violation of the principles of international law. We support the initiative of International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Grossi announced on 4 March for an agreement between Ukraine and Russia to ensure the safety and security of nuclear facilities in Ukraine.

We are deeply concerned at the catastrophic humanitarian toll taken by Russia's continuing strikes against the civilian population of Ukraine cities. We re-emphasize that indiscriminate attacks are prohibited by international humanitarian law. We will hold accountable those responsible for war crimes, including indiscriminate use of weapons against civilians, and we welcome the ongoing work to investigate and gather evidence, including by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

Russia's blatant violation of the fundamental principles of international peace and security and the breach of international law have not gone unanswered. We have imposed several rounds of far-reaching economic and financial sanctions. We will continue to impose further severe sanctions in response to Russian aggression, enabled by the Lukashenko regime in Belarus.

We wish to make clear to the Russian and Belarusian people that the severe sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus are a consequence of and clear reaction to President Putin's unprovoked and unjustifiable war against Ukraine. President Putin, and his Government and supporters, and the Lukashenko regime bear full responsibility for the economic and social consequences of these sanctions.

We condemn the widespread use of disinformation by the Russian Government and its affiliated media and proxies to support its military aggression against Ukraine. Their steady stream of fabricated claims is putting additional lives at risk. We commit to countering Russia's disinformation campaign.

We reaffirm our support and commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters. We underline that any purported change of status achieved by Russia's renewed aggression will not be recognized.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Ambassador of Germany. I will now continue with my update on the work of the subsidiary groups' coordinators. Since the adoption of the decision contained in document [CD/2229](#), our five coordinators have been holding bilateral consultations and drawing on the work done in the 2018 session. In our next meeting, which will take place on Thursday, 10 March, the delegations will be able to present their points of view and perspectives on the specific issues for discussion in the subsidiary groups, along with any other matter that the coordinators should bear in mind for their future work.

On the understanding that Thursday will be a dedicated to a full plenary session on this subject, I would now ask whether any delegation wishes to raise an urgent matter related to this agenda item.

I give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): As you have said, Madam President, on 22 February, we adopted the decision contained in document [CD/2229](#), which organizes our work related to the establishment of subsidiary bodies that will consider the various items on our agenda. On Thursday, my delegation will give a detailed account of how we see the work of the subsidiary bodies, as you have asked us to do. This decision was made just a fortnight ago, yet we have the sense today that an eternity has passed since then. In two weeks, the international security environment has abruptly deteriorated, with the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. France condemns in the strongest terms this unprovoked and unjustifiable war of choice against Ukraine by the Russian Federation, enabled by the Government of Belarus.

To meet today to discuss the way in which we will work in the subsidiary bodies, without considering what is happening outside these walls, just a few thousand kilometres from Geneva, would make no sense. It would not be understood by our superiors or by our peoples. Since the start of this attack, some 2 million civilians have been forced to flee Russian bombing and artillery fire. That figure continues to increase, hour by hour. The Russian Federation, a member of this Conference, is violating the most fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It is trampling international humanitarian law underfoot. It is violating all the rules that had been established to ensure security in Europe, including the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This conflict on European soil takes us back to a bygone century, but make no mistake: this does not affect Europeans alone, but rather all humanity, whether in Africa, Asia, Oceania or the Americas, because, when a permanent member of the Security Council deliberately decides to ignore humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions of 1949, it affects humanity as a whole. When a State undermines the European and international security architecture, all members of the Conference on Disarmament are affected, without exception.

We express our deep solidarity with the people of Ukraine and our sympathy with this war's victims and their families. This is the thirteenth day of the unprovoked and unjustified war in Ukraine. We deplore the numerous civilian casualties and the attacks by the Russian Federation, which are in complete violation of international humanitarian law. This weekend, we noted an unacceptable stance on the part of the Russian Federation, which declared a ceasefire and then broke it without valid justification. The humanitarian agencies of Ukraine and the United Nations must immediately have safe, swift and unimpeded access to populations in need everywhere within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine.

Madam President, International Women's Day has particular significance in the context of the armed aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation. France calls on the international community to pay particular attention to the specific needs of the women and girls who are victims of the war in Ukraine. The Ukraine crisis and resulting population displacements are increasing the risks of physical, including sexual, violence faced by women. France pays tribute to the courage of the Ukrainian women who have enlisted in the armed forces to defend their country's values. One week after fighting started, these women account for 15 per cent of the armed forces of Ukraine. The protection of civilians, including girls and women, must be a priority when we know that the Russian Federation is currently carrying out indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas of Ukrainian territory and has, according to several concurring sources, employed thermobaric weapons, ballistic missiles and cluster munitions against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. The use of such weapons could have tragic consequences for civilian populations; France strongly condemns it. We call on the Russian Federation fully to respect international humanitarian law and refrain from any actions that put civilians' lives and physical integrity at risk.

Madam President, my country refuses to resign itself to this tragic situation. We will not falter in our firm belief that only respect for the law can lead us to a lasting peace. Military force cannot be used as the solution for disputes. We reject this historic aggression. That is why we will remain fully involved in the Conference on Disarmament, a crucial forum for our collective security architecture and the only one mandated for the negotiation of disarmament treaties. We will support the relevant work of the subsidiary bodies. We are thinking, in particular, of subsidiary bodies 4 and 5, which must be given particular attention, being directly linked to the war in Ukraine. I am thinking, naturally, of security assurances and the issue of transparency in relation to weapons. My country is fully committed to the

Conference on Disarmament, but more realistic than ever about the likelihood that we will be able to start working on a sound basis again.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Ambassador of France. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Madam President, on International Women's Day, it is good to see a nearly all-female forum sitting here. And I would also like to note the presence with us here of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Tatiana Valovaya.

Later today, the European Union will make a statement; I can already say that we align ourselves with it.

My delegation would like to commend you, Madam President, for having organized today's thematic session on the importance of including women's perspectives on the topics of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. Some delegates to the Conference of Disarmament have argued that gender equality is not an issue at the Conference on Disarmament.

Madam President, I dare to challenge this assertion and that is why I want to speak in a formal session.

Discussing gender equality and women's empowerment in disarmament forums is important if we are to further our discussions on all of the security issues in all their aspects. Equal, full, effective and meaningful participation and leadership by women, including at decision-making levels, is of critical importance in reducing gender inequality. To counter the lack of substantive progress by the Conference on Disarmament in more than two decades, different voices and perspectives are needed to enhance the discussion around international peace and security.

The current war on the European continent demands an urgent and in-depth reassessment of the Conference's work and priorities. After more than 10 days of Russian military invasion of Ukraine, nearly 2 million people have fled their homes and their country, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Many people are internally displaced. My delegation is deeply concerned about the rapidly mounting humanitarian crisis inside Ukraine and in the neighbouring countries. The United Nations estimates that 54 per cent of people in need of assistance in the ongoing crisis are women. These numbers are expected to increase significantly within the current context.

My delegation reiterates, in the strongest possible terms, its condemnation of Russia's unwarranted, unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. It is a blatant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, and of Ukrainian sovereignty. The reported use of cluster bombs and thermobaric weapons by Russian military forces is unacceptable.

The Netherlands strongly condemns attacks on civilian targets and the use of cluster munitions by any actor at any time. We know that women and girls will be impacted differently and disproportionately by these weapons, including their long-lasting biological and physiological impacts.

In Russia, we are seeing more and more protests against the illegal invasion by Russia of Ukraine. 8 March is an important day in Russia, and our thoughts are with the mothers and the wives of the Russian soldiers who have already lost their lives and those who will lose their lives in the coming weeks and months as a result of Putin's war. Many Russian women are daring to speak out against this illegal invasion and daring to protest, despite the draconian sanctions being taken against those who want their voices to be heard.

Despite these dark and gloomy shadows over the current peace and security situation in Europe, I would like to continue on a more optimistic note on International Women's Day. Applying a gender lens to disarmament and conflict-related matters is in the interest of all people of all genders, as it can help States to enhance the security and well-being of everyone. Diversity leads to better results and gender equality brings gains for both men and women.

In this respect, I would like to refer to the outcomes of the global study on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the women and peace and security agenda over the past 15 years. The study provides a comprehensive evidence base, demonstrating that women's equal and meaningful participation in peace and security efforts is vital to sustainable peace. The global study includes key findings on how to build sustainable peace, participation, protection, justice and preventive efforts, and provides recommendations on core issues of peace and security focused on the needs and concerns of women in specific situations of conflict.

In conclusion, Madam President, my delegation aligns itself with the joint cross-regional statement delivered by the French delegation, which stresses our continued interest in making the technical update the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral. We also fully subscribe to and align ourselves with the statement by the Group of Seven, presented today by the German Ambassador.

The Netherlands is a long-standing advocate of gender equality, women's empowerment, diversity and inclusion in international peace and security, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament affairs. And we will continue to support that work. Today, on International Women's Day 2022, we stand in solidarity with all the women and girls worldwide, but especially with the women and girls of Ukraine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands. I give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Ms. McKernan (United States of America): Thank you, Madam President, for convening this session today on this very important day, International Women's Day. We very much appreciate your work on this effort.

I would also like to note that the United States aligns itself with the statement by the Group of Seven read by the distinguished German Ambassador.

Ensuring a diversity of perspectives on our work is of paramount importance to the United States. For that reason, I will not be delivering our remarks today. Instead, our intervention will be given by our Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, Bonnie Jenkins, via a video message.

The United States will also submit her remarks as a Conference on Disarmament document for inclusion in the record.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Madam Ambassador. I should like to know whether any other delegation wishes to take the floor. I see none. I will therefore suspend this meeting, so that we can go into an informal format for our event on the importance of including women's perspectives in discussions on the Conference on Disarmament agenda items. The meeting is suspended.

The meeting was suspended at 3.30 p.m. and resumed at 5.55 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish now to resume the formal meeting and announce that today's meeting is hereby concluded. Our next meeting will take place on Thursday, 10 March, at 10 a.m., when we will conclude our discussion on women's perspectives on the Conference on Disarmament agenda and listen to the delegations sharing their perspectives on the subsidiary groups. The secretariat will send you the organizational details of that meeting.

I wish to thank our panellists, in particular, for their active participation and cooperation in our discussions today and for their extremely interesting statements. I also thank all the members and delegates for their statements today, on International Women's Day. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.