

Conference on Disarmament

English

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


Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 30 June 2020, at 3.05 p.m.

President: Mr. Robert Müller (Austria)

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The President: I call to order the 1541st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. The first speaker on my list is Ambassador Hwang of France, who will be followed by the representative of the Russian Federation. I give Ambassador Hwang the floor.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to add a few words to the statement of the European Union, with which my delegation fully aligns itself.

I am delighted that the Conference on Disarmament is able to meet today, despite the rather unusual circumstances. Allow me to take this opportunity to express all my support for you in your role as President of the Conference. I welcome the new Ambassadors of Argentina, Tunisia and the Republic of Korea and wish them every success in the fulfilment of their mission.

We are going through a very special period full of paradoxes. On the one hand, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis has considerably slowed activity in our sector, prevented all sustained dialogue and led to the postponement or even cancellation of important meetings. On the other hand, the ongoing threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, recent developments on the international stage and the resurgence of tensions affect our collective security, making dialogue even more important. As we know, the disarmament crisis predates COVID-19, but the debates around COVID-19 and its consequences leave open the risk of permanently heightened tensions. We must not allow the current crisis to have a still greater impact on a multilateral system in which power relations are a systematic feature and international competition is becoming ever more intense. On the contrary, we must return to the multilateralism of effective and responsible disarmament. Effective means inclusive, responsible means truly serving international security and stability, taking into consideration everyone's security interests and particularly the interests of those that respect and apply collective norms. This will require the regeneration of the Conference. For France, the Conference remains an essential forum, as my Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs reiterated in the other chamber on 24 February. The Conference has managed to produce treaties that are essential to strategic stability, which is the core of its mandate; unfortunately, it was not possible to agree on a programme of work at the start of the year, despite the hard work of the six Presidents of the annual session.

This year, as in previous years, we deplore the long-standing stalemate in the Conference, although that does not make it pointless, quite the opposite. Today more than ever, it is our shared responsibility to make the best use of the Conference as the priority forum for dialogue on disarmament issues, avoiding all politicization. During this enforced break, we have realized the extent to which dialogue was sorely lacking and how a multilateral system without the Conference would be an unsound system.

Maintaining a solid strategic dialogue will allow us to counter the return of a conventional or nuclear arms race. Such a dialogue will also help bring us closer to the conditions allowing a resumption of negotiations in line with the Conference's mandate. That is why we welcome the return of Conference meetings so we can take stock of recent developments and give everyone the chance to be heard. We consider it essential for the Conference to instigate in-depth discussions related to the four main agenda items. In particular, we encourage the current and future Presidents to follow in the vein of the Australian presidency by fostering debate on the following topics.

Firstly, nuclear disarmament in conjunction with strategic risk reduction. France regularly calls on the other nuclear-weapon States, as did the President of the Republic in his speech of 7 February, to follow its lead in publicly explaining the foundations of their nuclear doctrines and to continue the ongoing dialogue on doctrines among the five nuclear-weapon States – France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia and China. This effort contributes to increased transparency and mutual trust and is therefore essential for preserving our collective security and reducing strategic risks.

Secondly, regarding nuclear disarmament, you are aware of the high priority given by my country to the negotiation, without delay, of a fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate it contains.

Thirdly, space security. This major strategic topic affects our collective security and yet we have not yet managed to agree on a shared pragmatic agenda allowing tangible improvements to the security of all. Space-based threats are increasing and, with them, the risks of misunderstandings, misperceptions and miscalculations. Some behaviour has a lasting effect on the space environment, for example the deliberate creation of volumes of long-lived debris. It is therefore becoming urgent to reduce these threats and risks and, together, to determine standards of responsible behaviour in space.

Finally, I would like to say how happy I am to hear your familiar and friendly voices, which I have been missing throughout these long days and which mean that we have finally begun debating again and returning to this conversation which is essential for finding solutions. Respect for our differences must go along with careful and attentive listening. We each have our own vision of collective peace, but one day or another we will have to bring together the things that unite us. In any case, be assured that my delegation and I will work resolutely and forcefully towards that goal. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, who will be followed by Ambassador Šćepanović of Montenegro.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the United Nations Office at Geneva, the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassadors Mansfield and Müller and all six Presidents of the current session for their efforts, which have allowed us to meet once again in the Palais des Nations and resume our plenary meetings.

In addition, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Gennady Gatilov, asked me to congratulate the delegations on the resumption of the Conference's work. He hopes that, during the time remaining to us, we will be able to discuss the agenda items, which are critically important for international security, constructively and in an atmosphere of mutual understanding.

I would also like to welcome the Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia, who have recently joined us.

Now I will move onto the subject of today's meeting, which our delegation considers extremely important, both for a better understanding of the current situation related to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and in determining the direction in which we should be moving forward.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that we are united in judging the current state of affairs in arms control and disarmament to be extremely unsatisfactory. Of course, delegations may disagree on the nuances. However, the overwhelming majority agree that a terrible deterioration is taking place in the system of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation that has been built up over decades. If it is not stopped, this process could lead to the most unpredictable and destructive consequences for international security. This is another matter on which there is no disagreement among States.

Since we already have a common understanding of the situation, the main question now is "What is to be done?" I would like to go into this in some more detail. Recently, a number of States have come forward with significant initiatives, primarily relating to nuclear arms control and nuclear risk reduction. I stress that these initiatives are highly significant for international security. However, the proposals that have been made are hardly capable of stopping the process I have just mentioned. There are a number of reasons for this.

Some of the initiatives are of a limited or provisional nature. They are also in no way capable of preventing certain States from building up their military nuclear capabilities. Others are still at the development stage and their content and goals require further clarification.

However, there is another reason, which I believe merits closer attention. It is related to the fact that lately, instead of drafting specific, carefully elaborated legally binding agreements, which, in accordance with the spirit and the letter of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 1969, constitute the regulatory backbone of international relations, it is being proposed that we take an easier path and base our strategic stability policy on some codes of conduct and vague political arrangements. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the supporters of such an approach will themselves strictly follow these rules and observe such arrangements.

In the meantime, this kind of approach looks more like an attempt by some to dampen down concerns about the increasingly damaging trend in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, while simultaneously justifying their own destructive actions. In addition, to conceal their disruptive position and find some kind of justification for it, they make groundless and sometimes absurd accusations against other States.

We are constantly hearing vacuous discussions about a new era in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. However, no one has yet been able to explain clearly why this new era should be built on the ruins of the old one, which for some reason has been declared incompatible with the current climate. It is not clear why we are being told that the only reliable way to ensure international security is to reject our previous achievements rather than add to them. Why should we abandon the current system of agreements on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, rather than continuing our efforts to strengthen it? Why should we ignore tried-and-tested basic principles rather than following them or improving them? I would like to know the origin of such a categorical rejection of previous approaches and understand the advantage of the so-called normative approach. All these questions require extremely clear answers.

In the view of our delegation, such an approach, combined with the events we have recently witnessed and the signals being sent by the military and political leadership of certain countries, would divert us from the resolution of pressing issues into a grey area of uncertainty and unpredictability. You will agree that such an atmosphere is, at the very least, undesirable in an extremely sensitive area for international security.

Regarding our common efforts to build the future foundation of international law on arms control and disarmament, I would like to recall another vital topic. Recently, sustained efforts have been made to instil in public opinion a view of global politics as arising from "great power rivalry". The matter is presented as if this rivalry will determine international security in the future. This idea, or rather this conceptual approach, is already stated almost as an axiom. It percolates from one doctrinal document to another as an undisputed dogma. This is despite the fact that no coherent arguments are made in favour of its correctness or its validity.

It is already being used to establish a foreign policy course based on a highly unsound chain of reasoning: that the growth of competition will cause increased tensions between States, which in turn will inevitably lead to military confrontation. In this confrontation, the side with the greatest military capabilities compared to its rivals will have the advantage. The resulting insinuation is that the only way to ensure international security is through the uncontrolled and unrestricted flexing of military muscle, including by adapting the latest technologies to meet that need.

Both the perversity and the danger of such reasoning are clear to see. However, before trying to get to grips with it, we should note that the idea of an inescapable "great power rivalry" has never been subject to any independent, unbiased and authoritative international analysis. It represents a certain political construction elaborated by the military and political establishment of a single State. In fact, there is nothing new in it insofar as it constitutes a contemporary interpretation of a model of international relations dating from the cold war.

Despite the fact that this construction is the product of one State, we are advised to take it on faith and use it as a reference point for international relations today. Unfortunately, some countries are prepared to take up this notion, base their foreign policy on it and even transmit it to the international community. This raises the reasonable question of whether it is worth rushing to do this. Perhaps it would be better to begin with a serious expert appraisal of this incontestable assertion before making conclusions and

drawing up plans. I hope that today's statement from the Russian delegation will help initiate this work.

I will just highlight some of the most significant points.

Firstly, those who promote the "great power rivalry" framework presume to make their assertions in impersonal terms, as if several of the world's leading countries held such opinions. This gives the impression that it is an objective truth. Russia for one has never asked anyone to make such judgments of our shared future in its name.

For the past three decades, our country has worked on the assumption that it is only possible to sustain peace and reinforce international security through open and constructive dialogue, the establishment of close cooperation to resolve the most urgent international issues and engagement in a spirit of true partnership, taking account of the interests of all parties to a particular process. The common goal of all these efforts has always been equal and indivisible security for all States without exception.

Our position remains unchanged. It is justified from a historical point of view. In the past, including the very recent past, it is easy to find very illuminating examples of the imposition by one State or a small group of States of their world view leading to catastrophic consequences both for individual regions and for the whole of humanity. The recent article by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, on the start of the Second World War was partly dedicated to this topic.

Secondly, acceptance of the "great power rivalry" framework would run counter not only to the approaches previously developed by the international community for the resolution of global issues, including in the area of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, but also to reality. After all, major multilateral forums, platforms and formats, which offer leading States a unique opportunity to agree, establish cooperation and therefore avoid the rivalry that causes a risk of conflict, have long been established and continue to operate. That is not to mention the United Nations, which was established with precisely these aims.

Moreover, if the main players in the aforementioned framework are understood to be China, Russia and the United States of America, I would like to point out that relations between Beijing and Moscow are not built on rivalry or brutal competition but are based on strategic partnership, mutual respect and mutually beneficial cooperation. For many years, the Russian Federation has been making efforts to develop its relations with the United States along similar lines. It is not our fault that we have not yet managed to make substantial progress. And yet the situation is far from hopeless, as shown for example by the Russian-American arms control talks that took place a few days ago.

Last week in Vienna, the Russian delegation reiterated its interest in meaningful, substantive and constructive dialogue with the United States on a broad range of issues and concerns related to arms control. Apart from common topics of strategic stability, the delegations of the two countries agreed to hold consultations on all aspects of the space issue, on transparency and verification with respect to nuclear arms control and on the latest strategic weapons systems. The consent of both sides to such a full agenda is promising.

I would like to stress once again that we, the Russian Federation, do not plan to engage in toxic competition with anyone, especially if it would increase tensions and military confrontation in the world. This is shown not only by the statements of Russian leaders at the highest political level, but also by the initiatives we propose regarding arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. It should be noted that, unlike some other initiatives, these are not only expressed very clearly but also propose specific practical steps that could reverse negative trends in this regard.

Thirdly, it is absolutely obvious that counting on force in inter-State relations is in no way compatible with restrictions imposed on States by international agreements concerning military build-up and the potential military use of existing weapons. It is clear precisely because the "great power rivalry" framework is promoted alongside the claim that the previous system of arms control and completely workable approaches to disarmament are inadequate and ineffective. We are basically being asked to reject the mechanisms, instruments and principles underlying the still existing (albeit diminished) system of agreements on arms control.

We are convinced that the current system of agreements can only be set aside when the outlines of the new system are at least understood. Otherwise, international legal nihilism will reign in the resulting vacuum.

We believe that relying on nothing but wishful thinking without any specifics would lead to a real danger of a new and more extensive arms race on a completely new technological level, with unpredictable consequences for humanity.

Another important point is that, if States agree with and are guided by the “great power rivalry” framework, then those who preach it would hardly have grounds to blame Russia, for example, for modernizing and improving its military capabilities. After all, the States that support this framework use it to warn us that, in the near future, global problems will once again be resolved using an iron fist and the law of the strongest. In that case, what complaints can there be against States that try to defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and citizens using the military capability appropriate to the situation?

Even this brief overview of the “great power rivalry” framework shows how dangerous it is to international security. What could we use as an alternative? The answer will seem simple and banal.

We need to agree, find compromises together and do the painstaking work of developing consensus decisions acceptable to all States affected by them. As much as possible, we should use the existing multilateral formats, mechanisms and platforms for that purpose. This kind of work excludes the brutal imposition of one’s own position or any one-sided view of our common future. On the contrary, it means involving all interested States, taking their positions into account, collectively discussing new ideas and looking for the best steps to take, which is fully compatible with the generally accepted principle of multilateralism.

It also means that every State will need to show political will and be able to demonstrate flexibility and a readiness to work towards a result. Judging by the achievements the international community has been able to make in the past, such an approach has fully proved its worth. We are sure that it will confirm its viability in the future as well.

One last point: in the current circumstances, the Conference has essentially become the leading disarmament forum, which imposes on States parties a special responsibility as regards discussion of the approved agenda. This is especially so as it contains a number of matters now becoming extremely relevant for international security. The contribution we make to strengthening the system of international agreements on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and the way we work together for the success of the upcoming multilateral disarmament forums, which will to a great extent define the efforts of the international community to build the international security architecture, depends on us and only on us. In this context, the resumption of our joint work is absolutely crucial.

Thank you for your attention and I thank the interpreters for their professional work.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you for your statement and for your kind words to the President.

(*spoke in English*)

I will now turn to Ambassador Šćepanović of Montenegro, to be followed by Ambassador Liddle of the United Kingdom. Ambassador Šćepanović, you have the floor.

Mr. Šćepanović (Montenegro): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for giving me the floor during this part of the meeting. I would like to congratulate Austria on assuming the presidency. We are convinced that your constructive and balanced approach will bring added value to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I would like to point out that Montenegro, as an observer State, has followed the work of the Conference with particular attention through the years and strongly appreciates its unique mandate. It is clear that, as the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating body, the Conference has an irreplaceable role and relevance and it is of utmost importance that it should return to substantive work. In this unprecedented global crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it is crucial to

preserve collective security and stability and the rule-based international order within a stable and strong multilateral framework.

The deadlock in which the Conference has remained for so many years clearly indicates the need for strong political will, increased trust and flexibility from all its members. Lessons from the past should not discourage us, but rather give us the strength to stand up for the future and bring the Conference back on track. History has shown the importance of having everyone on the same page when preserving the peace, and therefore it is crucial for this important body to improve mutual trust and reduce tensions.

This year we are witnessing excellent cooperation among the six Presidents of this session with their joint approach, and we use this opportunity to commend their efforts and to call for the continuation of this positive practice in the future.

As an observer state, Montenegro strongly supports the enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament. Since the last expansion in 2002, many countries, including Montenegro, have been standing in the waiting line to become members of the Conference.

My country also supports the discussions within this body on its methods of work. We think that the concept of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work should not act as a barrier to substantive work on core items on the Conference agenda. In that regard, we support the approach of the Netherlands, whereby Conference members should find ways of adopting a more pragmatic approach to the scheduling of our activities and not spend protracted time on procedural debates on the organization of work. Regrettably, when we reflect on past time, we can say that more than a thousand working hours with zero results is indeed protracted time.

Let me point out that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons represents a key multilateral instrument for ensuring international peace, security, stability and nuclear disarmament, and we call for its universalization and enhanced implementation. We think that the step-by-step approach is the realistic one in nuclear disarmament.

We encourage further initiatives and processes at international and regional levels to restore dialogue and trust and promote transparency and confidence-building measures.

We hope that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty will enter into force without further delay. In the meantime, it is important that all States uphold their moratorium on nuclear weapon test explosions, and any other nuclear explosions, and not undertake any action contrary to the provisions of the Treaty. In that regard, we call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to engage constructively, renew its political commitment to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and sign and ratify the Treaty.

Montenegro is of the view that the Conference on Disarmament should immediately commence negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty, on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. We would like to take this opportunity to express our support for the preservation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

We recognize the utmost importance of the New START and welcome the ongoing dialogue on its future beyond 2021 and on other arms control arrangements. We think that a trilateral format that would include the People's Republic of China would be a further step to enhancing the global security environment, international disarmament and the non-proliferation architecture.

Montenegro would welcome the active and equal participation of women and men in the Conference on Disarmament and supports the inclusivity of civil society in its work.

Since my posting in Geneva will end in a few days, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the delegates for their cooperation in the field of disarmament and express the wish that next year you will witness the unlocking of the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you all the best. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Ambassador Šćepanović for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President; I would also like to take this opportunity to wish him all the best for his personal and professional future. I now give the floor to Ambassador Liddle of the United Kingdom, to be followed by the delegate of Indonesia.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Thank you Mr. President. I would like, first of all, to take this opportunity to express our deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones

and suffered hardships during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and our solidarity with all countries that have been affected. The challenge the world faces in responding to COVID-19 is exceptional and unprecedented. There has never been a more critical and challenging time for the international community to work together.

Secondly, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Mansfield and the delegation of Australia on their presidency. Although the circumstances dictated that we were unable to meet, we are grateful to them for using the time to consult widely on how to make the Conference on Disarmament work more effectively. We welcome the statement delivered earlier by Ambassador Mansfield and the many good suggestions for taking our work forward, which we will study closely.

Thirdly, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your country's assumption of the presidency. My delegation stands ready to work with you and we offer you our full support. In particular, I would like to thank you, your team, 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, and our colleagues from the Conference on Disarmament secretariat and the United Nations Office at Geneva for the huge effort that has gone into ensuring that the Conference on Disarmament could actually meet today.

And fourthly, allow me to join others in welcoming our new colleagues, the Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia.

Mr. President, in your letter of 12 June, you said that the enforced three-month break was a good moment for reflection. While we have lost a lot of time – and the postponement of the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in particular was a notable setback – it is right that we must use this hiatus to reset our work. In all walks of life, the crisis makes us realize what we value most. If it emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in the face of our severest and most intractable problems, then it also underlines the value of this Conference. I hope that the resumption of our work today can see the start of a new spirit of cooperation.

That is why we particularly valued the consultation exercise carried out by the Australian presidency. We welcome your commitment to continue this exercise. We should use the time remaining to us in this session to reflect on the results of the exercise, as set out earlier by the Australian delegation, both through further consultations by the President and through discussion in our plenary meetings either side of the summer break. In this way, we could profitably use this truncated 2020 session. While we understand the challenges, we hope that the remaining presidencies can revisit the idea of setting out their plans for the remainder of the session, to allow delegations to plan accordingly.

In the hope then that we will have other opportunities to do so, Mr. President, I will refrain from going into detail on my delegation's views on the state of play today. Allow me for now just to echo what Ambassador Mansfield said in her statement about the need to interpret this Conference's negotiating mandate broadly, flexibly and creatively; just because this body has the authority to negotiate does not mean to say we cannot do other things that will progress its objectives. We also echo what Ambassador Mansfield said about the need to approach apparently intractable problems in a different way, from the ground up, and through a variety of types of instrument. This is particularly the case on space, where the need to address threats to operations in outer space is increasingly important, and where a focus on a comprehensive treaty on military capabilities relating to space risks blinding us to opportunities to tackle a range of discrete issues that would contribute to the safety and security of outer space and the stability and prosperity of Earth.

Finally for now, Mr. President, I would like to register my delegation's support for the proposal made by the Australian presidency for a technical amendment to the rules of procedure to render the language gender-neutral. These changes are long overdue, and we hope they will command consensus in this Conference.

Thank you once again for convening the Conference today, Mr. President, and I look forward to further fruitful discussions in the time remaining to us in this session.

The President: I thank Ambassador Liddle for his statement and the kind words addressed to the presidency. I will now give the floor to the delegate of Indonesia, to be followed by Ambassador Gabriëlse of the Netherlands.

Mr. Rosandry (Indonesia): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Please rest assured of Indonesia's continued support for the work of the presidency and this esteemed Conference. We also commend Ambassador Mansfield and her team for their able stewardship and relentless efforts during their country's presidency to maintain the engagement and coordination of the Conference members at this extraordinary time. Indonesia would also like to also join others in welcoming the Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia.

Indonesia associates itself with the statement made by Egypt on behalf of the Group of 21, and wishes to convey a few remarks in its national capacity.

Mr. President, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges to multilateral diplomacy, including in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation; the Conference on Disarmament is no exception. Amid the ongoing challenges faced by the Conference, the pandemic has delayed its work even more at a time when we need it most. With the postponement of the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and other related processes, Indonesia is of the view that the Conference members should make best use of the additional time to forge consensus and resolve the differences that have long hindered our efforts to achieve the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. This can be done by exploring all possible options – from in-person meetings to online exercises.

In this regard, Indonesia appreciates the efforts made by Austria and the secretariat to organize this meeting, with due consideration given to the current situation and to the health, safety and well-being of all delegates and United Nations staff as a priority.

I think that we all agree that the Conference on Disarmament should move forward if it is to fulfil its mandate effectively and retain its relevance. In order to do that, the finalization of the long-standing negotiations on the programme of work is key.

Mr. President, Indonesia's position in this Conference remains unchanged. We are of the firm view that nuclear disarmament is and must be the highest priority. The Conference should immediately negotiate and eventually conclude a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons. We should pursue the negotiations on a phased programme with a specified time framework.

The nuclear-weapon States should also uphold the non-nuclear-weapon States' legitimate right to an early agreement on effective, universal, unconditional, non-discriminatory and irrevocable legally binding security assurances. We need to advance a balanced treaty which addresses the concerns of both nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States in respect of the fissile material cut-off treaty. We also wish to urge the Conference members to put their collective efforts into addressing the potential threats of weaponized outer space and cyberspace.

Mr. President, Indonesia looks forward to working with all of you during this challenging time. We also stand ready to support the Conference on Disarmament in resuming its substantive work and fulfilling its mandate as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The President: I thank the representative of Indonesia for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President and I now give the floor to Ambassador Gabriëlse of the Netherlands, to be followed by Ambassador Gaffey of Ireland.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Mr. President, let me start by congratulating you on the assumption of your presidency during these challenging times. You can count on my delegation's full support. Let me also welcome the new colleagues in our midst, our colleagues from the Republic of Korea, Argentina and Tunisia. They can count on the full cooperation of my team.

In addition to aligning itself with the European Union statement delivered by Croatia, the Netherlands would like to make some remarks in its national capacity.

The fact that we are meeting here today we owe to you, Mr. President, to the six Presidents of the 2020 session, whose cooperation in the Conference this year has been exemplary, to the secretariat and, of course, to the host country, Switzerland.

We are going through challenging times in terms of global health and the economic fall-out of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis. Also, national and geopolitical tensions are rising. International and multilateral cooperation is key in addressing these challenges effectively. It is therefore necessary more than ever that we, who are working on multilateral security issues, get back to work as fully as possible. If we want to address these challenges, we need to find ways to cooperate, by listening to each other's point of view, understanding each other's security concerns and finding mutually acceptable ways forward.

Stopping communication channels and this dialogue can lead to misunderstanding. Furthermore, the silence we have seen is filled with a so-called "infodemic", which exacerbates the current tensions. So it is high time to get the multilateral disarmament machinery rolling again.

Of course, this needs to be done responsibly, taking into account the hygiene and physical distancing measures which our host country, together with United Nations Office at Geneva, prescribes. We also need to find new, creative ways to conduct multilateral cooperation, as restrictions on meetings will remain in place for a while and, of course, we must ensure that the basic multilateral principles of inclusivity and multilingualism are adequately taken care of. The "new normal" will likely not be the same as the "old normal". In these uncertain circumstances, rather than putting everything on hold or trying to postpone our work, we need to find creative ways to do our work in the best possible way. We cannot afford to stop working on implementing the current multilateral disarmament instruments that we have signed up to while developments continue on the ground and in space alike. Anti-personnel mines are still being laid every day, by, among others, non-State actors, and people continue to fall victim to them. We need to continue with our transparency- and confidence-building measures in the field of biosecurity/safety, in order not to be confronted with a biological weapon one day. We need to ensure that the Non-Proliferation Treaty continues to be implemented and is upheld, especially when some of the core agreements in the nuclear field are being placed under ever-increasing pressure. We need to ensure that the arms trade continues to be conducted responsibly and prevent diversion of small arms and light weapons. The international frameworks and instruments that underpin these actions need to be monitored, reviewed and updated, even in an altered and adapted way compared to what we are used to. The disarmament community in Geneva has a role to play and so does the Conference on Disarmament.

The Netherlands welcomes the idea of continuing our programme in the Conference on Disarmament as we proposed before the lockdown on the basis of the agenda items. We support discussions on nuclear risk reduction, nuclear disarmament verification and, of course, on banning fissile materials for nuclear weapons. We also support the idea of sharing and discussing national policies on outer space, as a first and imminent transparency and confidence-building measure and in order to further advance our work on agenda item 3, on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We are keen to have further discussions on new weapons technologies and systems, as technical developments in the field are moving and need to be addressed.

We also support a discussion on the effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament, illustrated by our "Back to basics" working paper of last year. We had a fruitful discussion then under the Vietnamese presidency and we are keen to continue and deepen that discussion. In that light, we fully support the proposal by the former Australian presidency to make the rules of procedure gender-neutral. With a current female Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and several female Presidents so far, it is high time that we stop referring to these jobholders as "he" or "him". It is archaic. This simple language fix, as proposed, is long overdue and should not require a complicated discussion.

In conclusion, we are pleased to see the Conference on Disarmament meeting once again and we look forward to moving up the gears in the different disarmament forums as the improvement of the pandemic situation allows.

The President: I thank Ambassador Gabriëlse for his statement and his kind words addressed to the presidency. I now give the floor to Ambassador Gaffey of Ireland, to be followed by the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Gaffey (Ireland): Thank you, Mr. President. Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union presidency.

Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Ambassador Müller, and your team on your assumption of the presidency. I can assure you of my country's full cooperation and support for you in undertaking this important role. I would also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Mansfield and the outgoing Australian presidency for steering the Conference on Disarmament over the past months. At a time when coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was keeping us apart, you found ways of engaging us, including through your extensive informal consultations on bringing the Conference on Disarmament back to substantive work.

Mr. President, effective multilateralism is central to my country's foreign policy. The current pandemic, which continues to take so many lives and challenges societies worldwide, has fundamentally altered our everyday lives. But it has also highlighted our shared humanity and demonstrated just how critical multilateral institutions are to our collective health, prosperity and security. The crisis demands of us that we enhance international cooperation and act in global solidarity when facing the most pressing challenges.

In this regard, we should remind ourselves of the vital role this Conference has played in the past in negotiating arms control and disarmament agreements. Its notable achievements have made a significant contribution to international peace and security and demonstrate what can be done when there is a collective will among the membership.

Sadly, none of these achievements are recent. The Conference has failed to make progress on any substantive work for over two decades. The hiatus brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic should give us pause for thought. The Conference on Disarmament is a well-resourced body with a strong mandate to make a real difference in our world. And we should now seize the opportunity we are presented with to finally break the impasse. It is incumbent on us to rebuild a common vision for international security and disarmament, including through a reinvigorated, effective Conference on Disarmament which would allow for, among other things, the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty.

Ireland was encouraged by the innovative, cooperative approach taken by the six Presidents of this year's session, and we are ready to work with all members to rebuild consensus and fulfil the mandate of this important Conference.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The anniversary comes at a time of increased tension and in a deeply challenging security environment. However, we should recall that the Treaty itself came into being during one of the most tense periods in human history. The Treaty is proof of what can be achieved when we hold firm to multilateralism as the key to solving global challenges.

The postponement of this year's Review Conference was unavoidable, and it does not in any way diminish the importance of the Treaty. With the postponement comes an opportunity to use the additional time to better prepare for a substantive Review Conference. A key priority for Ireland is ensuring tangible progress across all three pillars, with a particular focus on nuclear disarmament and the implementation of past commitments. Ireland believes that, to ensure a successful outcome in 2020, all States must, as a starting point, reaffirm their commitment to the consensus-based outcomes we have collectively reached over the past 50 years. This includes the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapons States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

Another of the Conference's notable achievements has been the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, an essential element in the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. Ireland calls on the remaining annex 2 States to demonstrate leadership by ratifying the Treaty with utmost urgency. Pending this, we also underscore the importance of existing moratoriums on testing being strengthened and reinforced. Any resumption of nuclear testing would damage the global norm established by the Treaty and weaken the disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Ireland is pleased to support the technical change proposed by Australia to the rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral. This would be a small but significant indicator of the Conference's modernization. In our role as co-chair of the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group, we continue to promote efforts to strengthen the application of gender perspectives and encourage the full and equal participation of women

and men in disarmament and security decision-making. We need to be mindful that the progress we have made in including the diversity of voices in our work should not be undone by technical or other barriers to equal participation in virtual meetings or meetings of reduced in-person attendance.

Mr. President, effective cooperation and engagement on disarmament issues is particularly important in an environment of tension and distrust. We remain firmly convinced that multilateral dialogue and negotiation is vital to our shared goal of a peaceful, secure world. Many old challenges remain unresolved, and we face new ones in new domains, including in outer space. We welcome the talks on arms that began in Vienna last week. We strongly urge the Russian Federation and the United States to extend the New START beyond 2021 without delay and to initiate talks on further reductions. It is our duty to uphold and strengthen the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture in the interests of global peace and security. The Conference on Disarmament can and should be at the centre of those efforts.

The President: I thank Ambassador Gaffey for his statement and the kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium, to be followed by the representative of Poland.

Ms. Marchand (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President. First allow me to say how happy my delegation is to see the Conference on Disarmament meeting again after the unprecedented events we have experienced during the past months. We hope that all the colleagues here present and their families have stayed in good health throughout this difficult period. Allow me to wish you every success as President of this esteemed conference and assure you of my delegation's full support. My delegation thanks you and the secretariat for the major efforts you have made to allow the resumption of our work. I would also like to thank the Australian presidency for the very useful briefing this morning on the steps it has taken and for its proposal to make the rules of procedure gender-neutral, which we support.

The crisis we have just been through reminds us of how interconnected we are and of the extent to which we can solve global problems only through cooperation and by pooling our individual efforts for the common good. The crisis has once again highlighted our vulnerabilities. It has brought out our collective weaknesses. It has revealed the urgent need for robust and revitalized multilateralism. Disarmament is no exception to this need. The current security context is bleak and mistrust is dominating agendas. More than ever, it is vital for us to overcome our disagreements to show that we are equal to the collective challenges we face. The Conference must succeed in performing its driving role as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. As we stressed at the start of the year and as we repeat more forcefully today, there can be no more excuses for inaction.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and wishes to add a few comments in its national capacity. Belgium places particular importance on an international order based on the rule of law and on the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. In this respect, my country reiterates the importance of respecting and fulfilling the commitments made under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, including those made at past Review Conferences. Regarding a ban on the production of fissile material, major preparatory work has been done in recent years to facilitate the start of negotiations for a treaty. No longer should anything impede the beginning of these negotiations. Regarding nuclear testing, we would like to underscore the importance of absolute compliance with voluntary moratoriums in anticipation of the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Finally, we would encourage all the parties concerned to work on reducing their nuclear arsenals, strengthen confidence-building, transparency and verification measures and strive resolutely to renew the New START.

Belgium will have the honour of presiding over the work of the Conference in 2021. We hereby reiterate our willingness to ensure a constructive and inclusive presidency in close cooperation with the next group of Presidents for the annual session. We would also like to take the opportunity to warmly thank the six Presidents for this year for having included us in their work as observers.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Belgium for her statement and for her kind words for the presidency.

(spoke in English)

I now give the floor to the representative of Poland, to be followed by Ambassador Valero of Venezuela.

Mr. Broilo (Poland): Mr. President, first of all, let me congratulate Austria and you personally on the assumption of this important function and wish you a positive outcome of your presidency. Thank you also for your inspiring introductory speech. Let me also commend the preceding Australian presidency for its efforts to keep disarmament issues alive, despite the pandemic situation.

We highly value the cooperation among the six Presidents of the 2020 session and their consultations with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session. This is how the efforts around the Conference on Disarmament should be consolidated, especially in the current circumstances.

I would like also to address warm words of welcome to new the Ambassadors, of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia.

Mr. President, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the fiftieth anniversary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty make this year an exceptional one for disarmament. We believe that we will manage to return to substantive, topical debate in the Conference on Disarmament when the pandemic situation allows, most probably at the beginning of next year. Since we now, in fact, have only a few weeks at our disposal, it is quite obvious that there is no possibility of beginning the structured substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament.

We therefore think that it would be wise to use this opportunity for discussion and reflection on different aspects of disarmament, including the questions of space and new technologies, as was also mentioned by the Ambassadors of Argentina and the United Kingdom. We also believe that addressing the organizational aspects of the Conference on Disarmament will be beneficial and will serve our future goal of commencing negotiations.

In conclusion, let me assure you, Mr. President, of our full support and cooperation.

The President: I thank the representative of Poland for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to Ambassador Valero of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, who will speak remotely, to be followed by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Valero (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) *(spoke via video link) (spoke in Spanish)*: Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela takes the opportunity to salute the President of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Robert Müller of Austria, and the secretariat of the Conference, and to thank them for their intrepid efforts in organizing this plenary meeting. We welcome the extensive bilateral and regional consultations that were conducted by the Austrian delegation in a transparent and inclusive manner. The approach taken by Austria is particularly important given the difficult security climate in which we find ourselves.

We also take the opportunity to warmly greet the delegations of countries that are making huge efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused more than 500,000 deaths worldwide. The toll in human lives is tragic, even in developed countries, which were unprepared for this serious health emergency owing to the application of inhumane neoliberal policies.

The situation highlights the need to re-examine the global security paradigm as we know it. The Group of 21 countries have consistently called for recognition of the fundamental link between disarmament and development. We believe that international peace and security are not independent of development and will not be achievable while immense financial resources continue to be used to increase weapons capabilities, leading to a new arms race, instead of promoting development.

In that context, multilateral cooperation is vital to tackling the increasingly complex common challenges to international peace and security. A global crisis is not a good time to exacerbate the risk of aggression or to weaken the delicate international legal regime on

disarmament. On the contrary, it is time to devote greater effort to properly addressing and seeking progress on the Conference's agenda items.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela condemns and repudiates the recent threats by the Government of the United States of America to restart nuclear testing in the Nevada desert, threats which further weaken the legally binding nuclear disarmament regime on the eve of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which has now been postponed until next year.

Mr. President, we face the possibility of nuclear tests being conducted again in close proximity to the Latin American and Caribbean region. As is well known, my country is particularly concerned by these threats, since the United States Government has subjected it to illegal, unscrupulous and unilateral coercive measures which violate the human rights of our people, with effects similar to those of a conventional war. The United States Government has already withdrawn from major international security and disarmament agreements, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with the Russian Federation and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. It is also threatening to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies and the New START. The nuclear history of the United States tells us that it is the only country to have used an atomic bomb, so the prospect of further nuclear testing by that country offers no assurance of international security.

The threat of further nuclear testing by the United States has been met with disquiet and fear in the international community. It represents a vicious assault on an already fragile international security environment. Countless experts, academics and non-governmental organizations consider that nuclear testing by the United States would serve only to unleash the bloodiest of arms races, aggravated by the development of emerging weapons technologies in outer space and cyberspace and lethal autonomous weapons systems. This irresponsible, menacing and provocative behaviour by the United States Government will ultimately bring catastrophic consequences upon humanity. As member States of the Conference on Disarmament we cannot remain silent; we cannot wait for a nuclear tragedy to unfold before condemning this deplorable threat and acting accordingly.

My country regrets that the dynamics of the Conference's work in 2020 and the institutional obstacles presented by the pandemic have prevented the Conference from devoting greater efforts to the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that urgently addresses nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space, among other pressing issues. We must be careful not to reduce this Conference to a purely deliberative body, deprived of its negotiating mandate. The Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament gave the Conference a clear negotiating mandate and established priorities in disarmament. The purpose of the Conference, as the appropriate body for negotiations on that subject, must be preserved. The Conference's future efforts and resources should be directed towards condemning nuclear escalation and making progress on the programme of work. It should prevent and condemn initiatives that seek to undermine the international security environment and weaken the legally binding disarmament regime, and which will lead only to the further escalation of violence and aggression.

The President: I thank Ambassador Valero for his statement and his kind words addressed to the presidency. Now, I will give the floor to the representative of Iraq, to be followed by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al-Fatlawi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I would like to congratulate you and your team on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of the full support of my delegation. I also wish to thank the previous presidents for their sincere efforts. I am pleased to welcome the new ambassadors who have joined the Conference, from Tunisia, Argentina and the Republic of Korea. I would also like to thank you for choosing to discuss the subject of multilateralism, which, as the current circumstances have shown, is more important and necessary than ever before. My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, the maintenance of international peace and security is one of the noble goals of the Charter of the United Nations, and to that end effective collective measures have been undertaken to prevent the emergence of threats to peace and to

establish this responsibility on the basis of multilateralism. Multilateral, non-discriminatory and transparent global negotiations have formed the basis for international agreements on disarmament and arms control, as they allow member States to consult and cooperate with each other to find collective solutions that contribute to establishing friendly multilateral relations. The world is now witnessing the erosion of this multilateralism in the field of disarmament, as some member States resort to unilateral actions to address their security concerns, which endangers international peace and security and undermines confidence in the collective security system established by the United Nations. Iraq, like many member States, reaffirms that multilateralism is the fundamental principle for addressing concerns related to disarmament and non-proliferation and dealing with the challenges facing humanity.

Mr. President, the challenges facing the world in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic prove once again that the peoples of the world are interconnected. Iraq therefore considers multilateralism to be a key approach in joining forces to face regional and international crises and challenges, including the challenge of nuclear disarmament, which is one of the main objectives of the work of this forum, and the most important of the three pillars of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as it is directly linked to achieving international peace and security. The only guarantee against the threat or use of nuclear weapons is the complete elimination of these weapons.

Mr. President, preserving the values of multilateralism and international cooperation is essential to promoting international development, security and peace. These values are essential, as they contribute to raising the level of compliance with international standards. Global issues and various humanitarian crises push us to develop understandings that respect the values and interests of nations and require attention and collective action through multilateralism and diplomacy, at a time when political, social and economic conditions and relations between States are affected by the impact of technological progress and acceleration.

In conclusion, Mr. President, as is well known, the Conference on Disarmament is the only multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations. It has achieved many successes through negotiation and the adoption of many international treaties and conventions related to disarmament, which demonstrates once again that multilateralism is capable of great achievements provided that there is the political will on the part of member States. Iraq therefore calls on all member States to show flexibility in order to achieve the objectives for which the Conference was established, by redoubling efforts to reach a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that deals with the four core issues related to the Conference's work and meets the concerns of all member States, in accordance with the Conference's rules of procedure.

Thank you, Mr. President, and I wish you and the other presidents every success in your endeavours.

The President: I thank the representative of Iraq for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President. I now give the floor to Ambassador Baghaei Hamaneh of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation would like to begin by offering our congratulations to Austria and to you, Ambassador, on your assumption of the Conference on Disarmament presidency and assure you of my country's cooperation as you discharge your responsibility.

I welcome our new colleagues, the distinguished Ambassadors of Tunisia, the Republic of Korea and Argentina, and look forward to working with them in advancing our collective work in the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, this is the first meeting of the Conference on Disarmament following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that forced almost all multilateral bodies to suspend or dramatically reduce their activities for more than three months. The COVID-19 pandemic has surely been the most disturbing development affecting organized human society during the first half of 2020.

However, the international community was relatively quick in creatively finding ways to outpace the pandemic and to resume work, particularly through virtual means.

States and international organizations have made every effort to keep multilateral processes alive and working. This is all the more critical given the detrimental blow already levelled by unilateralist forces against multilateral processes and institutions and the rule of law for the past several years.

Mr. President, unilateralism of all sorts continues to undermine multilateral processes and institutions. These, if left unbridled, would make irreversible fatal impacts on the legal and institutional constructs developed over the past eight decades and put the entire edifice of post-war multilateralism at serious risk. Multilateralism necessitates respect for collective norm-making and standard-setting processes, respect for the outcome of those processes and respect for the mandate and confines of international institutions. The overall aim of this collective endeavour is to serve the international community's common good responsibly and reasonably by maximizing our shared interest and minimizing the common threats and challenges.

Unilateralism is debasing all these three elements. The advocates of unilateralism proclaim quite openly that they recognize no interest except their own, reserve the right to act only in their own interest and with overwhelming force and have no regard for any tedious legalisms that may stand in their way.

The norm-making activities in many multilateral settings have come to a halt as a result of prevailing unilateral impulses and reckless disregard for our shared interest and common concerns. The Conference on Disarmament is just one living example. The Conference remains paralysed due to the unwillingness of the very few to live up to their responsibility in respect of nuclear disarmament. Unilateralists have no regard for the commitments they have made under bilateral or multilateral agreements. They do not hesitate to violate their obligations under key bilateral treaties and multilateral deals without any justification. This approach has left many States wondering about the future of some fundamental principles that have long governed our civic life and inter-State interactions, particularly the principles of respect for international treaties and the rule of law.

The United States has not spared multilateral institutions either, without even considering its abrupt ill-intentioned departures from international bodies. Its tendency to malignly influence international organizations for the purposes of its unilateralist agenda is truly irresponsible and has tremendous consequences. The United States has long employed or manipulated the United Nations Security Council for its own interests. These abusive policies have been manifested most recently in its push to attack Security Council resolution 2231, as part of its extremely malicious attempt to dismantle the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action following its unlawful unilateral withdrawal from that agreement, in material breach of its obligations and in a stark violation of resolution 2231.

In the words of Minister Zarif, "the United States is not merely violating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and bullying others to do so, too. It also has the dishonour of being the first State in the history of the United Nations to punish law-abiding countries for not violating a Security Council resolution."

Mr. President, radical unilateralism has been the supreme cause of the degradation of the security environment across the globe. Radical unilateralism is posing a constant threat to law and order and to peace and security. It continues to inflict severe damage, not only to international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter but also to human life and dignity through unilateral coercive measures of all kinds. Rule of law and *pacta sunt servanda* are the two main casualties of unilateralism and lawlessness; insecurity, violence and chaos will be its ultimate product.

We need to recognize that unilateralism will never be checked through appeasement. Appeasement will only instigate more bullying by emboldening the bully. We need to stick to our shared principles and values, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations and generally understood as international law. Otherwise, international relations will further morph into a lawless theatre manipulated by the whims and malice of egoistic unilateralists, where their eccentric sense of greatness is set against the humanity of all the others. Radical unilateralism has turned the hegemonic Power into a rogue actor. In the words of a prominent scholar, "Hegemonic power offers the opportunity to become a rogue State, freely defying international law and norms while facing increased resistance abroad and contributing to its own decline through self-inflicted wounds."

Mr. President, the Islamic Republic of Iran remains determined in its support for a world free of weapons of mass destruction. As victims of atrocious chemical attacks by the Saddam regime, Iranians can truly feel the trauma and injustice caused by these inhuman weapons. Just two days ago, we marked the thirty-third anniversary of that regime's chemical attack on the north-western city of Sardasht, West Azerbaijan province. On 28 and 29 June 1987, Iraqi warplanes dropped chemical weapons on four crowded parts of the city, killing and injuring thousands of people. The victims dropped lifeless on the streets of the town centre; some died immediately, some after vomiting and experiencing excruciating pain. This was not, of course, the first chemical attack carried out by Saddam's military against Iranians. But it was unprecedented, in that a purely civilian target was deliberately gassed. Less than a year later, on 18 March 1988, Saddam's war machine carried out similar atrocities against his own people in Halabja. After 33 years, many residents of the city are still suffering from the traumatic effects of the chemical attacks and are struggling for their lives. The victims are still demanding justice, as certain European companies were directly involved in providing Saddam with chemical substances, with the knowledge of their Governments.

There is also undeniable evidence that Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iranians, "in connivance with the United States", to quote former United States Secretary of State Brzezinski. "Based on the documentary evidence that the targeting by the Iraqis of Iranian objects and particularly population centres was known to us and the United States was providing them precise information on where to strike, knowing that the effect would be massive casualties." The chemical strike that still haunts Kurds occurred during the eight-year-long Iraq-imposed war against Iran.

Mr. President, Iran continues by all means to advocate nuclear disarmament and underlines the absolute responsibility of nuclear-weapon States in this regard. The perceived role and function of the Conference on Disarmament cannot be over-emphasized in that respect.

The long-time stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament is extremely regrettable. It is definitely detrimental to the cause of nuclear disarmament. My delegation urges all members to agree on a balanced and comprehensive programme of work so that they can commence negotiating the substantive elements of legally binding instruments on core issues without further delay. It is the responsibility of all Conference on Disarmament members to uphold the Conference's role and mandate as the single, international negotiating forum devoted to disarmament and avoid turning this body into a deliberative platform.

The prevailing security challenges should compel us to prioritize nuclear disarmament, since nuclear weapons continue to pose an existential threat to humanity.

The President: I thank Ambassador Baghaei Hamaneh for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President. I will now give the floor or the microphone to Ambassador Wood of the United States of America, who will speak remotely.

Mr. Wood (United States of America) (*spoke via video link*): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and offer the support of the United States delegation as you carry out your duties. I also want to thank you for making the virtual participation option available.

Let me also welcome the new Ambassadors from the Republic of Korea, Argentina and Tunisia. I also want to congratulate Australia for the great work during its presidency.

Mr. President, the United States position on the need for effective, verifiable and enforceable arms control has not changed. We are engaged in a strategic security dialogue with Russia and seek a trilateral arms control agreement with both Russia and the People's Republic of China in order to reduce the risks of war and miscalculation and to avert an arms race. Ultimately, we seek a new era of arms control that covers all unconstrained Russian nuclear weapons and includes the People's Republic of China.

Regarding the New START, the Administration is evaluating the extension of that Treaty, but we must do so taking into account the broader security environment that we face today, including how the actions of both Russia and China are affecting that environment.

The security of the American people and that of our allies is foremost in our thinking. As you know, the United States has decided to exercise its right to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies. This is because Russia flagrantly and continuously violates its obligations and implements the Treaty in ways that may contribute to military threats against the United States and our European partners and allies, ways that are an attempt to further Russia's false propaganda narratives regarding its aggressive actions against its neighbours. In accordance with the Treaty's terms, the United States has notified the depositaries of its decision to withdraw. Our withdrawal will take effect six months after delivery of our notice to the Treaty depositaries, that is 22 November 2020. The United States reserves the right to reconsider this decision until its withdrawal becomes effective but would only reconsider should Russia return to full compliance with the Treaty.

Our persistent concerns about the aggressive and destabilizing nuclear posture adopted by Russia are not just limited to that country's status as a serial treaty violator but are based on a broad array of factors that also include its military exercises, strategy and capabilities. For example, as United States base command reported, Russia tested a direct-ascent anti-satellite missile on 15 April. This flight test likely advances its development of a ground-based missile system capable of destroying targets in low-Earth orbit. When fielded, this missile will join the previously announced "combat-laser system" as a second ground-based anti-satellite system developed by Russia. This action is the latest in a disturbing pattern of ongoing irresponsible Russian space activities and demonstrates its hypocrisy in calling for a treaty on weapons in outer space.

Anti-satellite missile testing and provocative on-orbit behaviour further demonstrate the urgent need to develop and identify norms of responsible behaviour in outer space. The United States will continue to work with all responsible space-faring nations to develop such norms and to confront threats to United States, allied and partner interests in outer space.

Now, turning to the world's leading State sponsor of terror, the world's leading rogue State, Iran, the special representative for Iran and senior policy adviser to the Secretary, Brian Hook, has said, "the United States maximum pressure campaign has constrained and countered Iran in unprecedented ways. We have deprived the clerical rulers of vast amounts of revenue. We have disrupted their financial networks and their sectarian networks. Because of our pressure, Iran's leaders are facing a decision: either negotiate with us or manage economic collapse." And this is important particularly in the face of Iran's recent destabilizing and aggressive acts. For example, Iran launched a military satellite on 22 April in defiance of the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231. It is particularly striking that a foreign terrorist organization – the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – was responsible for the launch and has now proudly announced itself as a space force. Moreover, like that body's tragic downing of Ukraine Air Flight 752 by an Iranian SA 15 surface-to-air missile system, the recent Iranian naval incident involving a sophisticated anti-ship missile proves to be another demonstration by Iranian security forces that Iran is not responsible enough to possess advanced conventional weapons, let alone purchase or proliferate them.

We call on the Security Council to extend the arms embargo on Iran. We should place more pressure on Iran, not less. In addition, at the June International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors meeting, the Agency's Director General, Rafael Grossi, noted with serious concern that, for over four months, Iran had denied IAEA access to two locations and that, for almost a year, it has not engaged in substantive discussions to respond to the Agency's questions related to possible undeclared nuclear material and nuclear-related activities.

Iran is legally obligated to answer the questions and provide IAEA with access to the specified locations. We have made it clear that Iran must comply with its nuclear safeguards obligations and provide IAEA with nothing short of full and timely cooperation.

Concerning China, since originating in Wuhan, China, last year, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has spread to at least 185 countries and regions. Let us be clear, the world is suffering as a result of the malfeasance of the Chinese Government. China's cover-up of the virus allowed the disease to spread all over the world enabling a global pandemic that has caused over a million lives worldwide and is not going away any time soon. Throughout this outbreak, the United States and, in fact, the world, demanded full transparency and information-sharing from the People's Republic of China to combat the

pandemic and prevent future outbreaks. Instead, Chinese officials continued to deny and deflect, to ignore their reporting obligations to the World Health Organization (WHO). People's Republic of China officials even pressured WHO to mislead the world when the virus was first discovered by Chinese authorities. WHO repeatedly parroted the Chinese Government's claims that the coronavirus was not spreading between humans, despite warnings by doctors and health officials that it was. The Organization also made the disastrous decision to oppose travel restrictions from China and other countries despite applauding travel restrictions within China itself, leading to further spread of the virus internationally. As a result, and at the behest of Chinese officials, countless lives have been taken and profound economic hardship has been inflicted around the globe.

The international community demands answers from China. That country's pattern of misconduct is well known. It needs to end. We must have transparency. We demand accountability. Denial and deflection have killed too many. The Chinese Communist Party will be held accountable by history. It is at this juncture, with the world calling on China to end its reliance on secrecy, that the United States again urges China to join trilateral arms control talks. If China truly wants to be a responsible Power, it must assume the security responsibilities that go with being a responsible Power – in the public health sector, on arms control matters and beyond.

The notion that China should not be expected to engage in nuclear arms control until it has built up to the same levels as the United States and Russia is an outdated display of cold war logic. Today's logic dictates that a three-way arms control agreement would provide the best way forward to avoid an unpredictable three-way arms race. It is time for China to join the democracies of the world, to embrace positive change, to strive to be better, to evolve.

We would also like to learn more about the call by the so-called *Global Times*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, for China to add 1,000 – that is right, 1,000 – nuclear warheads to its arsenal. So, we wait to hear a further explanation.

Before I conclude, Mr. President, I would be remiss if I did not again emphasize the need for a discussion in the Conference on Disarmament on working methods. Given that this body has a negotiating mandate regarding its four core agenda items, if we choose to meet during these uncertain times, it should be to approve a programme of work. Iran and a handful of others have made it clear throughout the 2020 session, however, that all such efforts will be rejected. Is the fact that we are now meeting during a pandemic to discuss arms control and disarmament issues tacit acceptance that we are now, in fact, a discussion body? That is quite a leap from a negotiating mandate. I commend the efforts of Australia in using its presidency to gauge how member States define the Conference's goals and objectives and appreciate the Ambassador's briefing about the results of those survey efforts. I have to say that my delegation was quite concerned when Ambassador Mansfield made the point that there is no consensus in the Conference on Disarmament on a mandate to negotiate. It begs the question of, if there is no consensus to negotiate in the Conference on Disarmament, what are we doing?

Going forward, if we use this unique opportunity to hit "pause" on our meetings while the Conference Presidents continue the critical efforts of Australia, that would help us to converge around a common understanding of this body's purpose and the way to achieve our shared objectives. Then, when our health and safety is more certain and we do return to work, we could do so from a place of strength and unity.

The President: I thank Ambassador Wood for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the President. I would now like to give the floor to Ambassador Ogasawara of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the important responsibility of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at this very challenging juncture. Please be assured of our full support for your presidency.

I would like to express Japan's appreciation for the firm determination that Austria and others of the group of the six Presidents of this session, the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session have shown in resuming the work of the Conference on Disarmament. The creation of this new format of a Conference on

Disarmament plenary meeting with an option to participate virtually demonstrates how our common efforts can overcome the new challenges and difficulties facing us all.

I would like to pay tribute to the innovative work done by the secretariat, which has made today's meeting possible despite the unprecedented technical constraints while meeting the requirements of inclusiveness. We are also delighted that member States have supported the decision of the presidency to resume the activities of the Conference on Disarmament and are participating remotely or in person, expressing their commitment to the important role played by this body.

We are thankful for the work of the outgoing Australian presidency in managing the recent unprecedented challenges and successfully maintaining our unity through a series of bilateral and regional meetings and meetings of the different presidencies while facing various constraints due to coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Japan expects that the presidencies will continue this constructive coordination process and we will continue to support it.

We have heard today the extremely rich results of the meetings that Ambassador Mansfield conducted, which are very useful in understanding the current status of member States' interests and thinking on the Conference's substantive topics. We support every initiative to invigorate substantive discussion, which will create favourable conditions that we hope will be conducive to future multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Japan joins the many previous speakers who have spoken in favour of the Australian initiative to make the rules of procedures gender-neutral. I also join them in extending my heartfelt welcome to the three new Ambassadors from Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia.

Mr. President, from the current and unfortunately ongoing pandemic crisis, we can, in my view, draw two preliminary lessons relevant to the work of the Conference on Disarmament: first, this crisis has led the international community to reaffirm the value of human life, which has reminded us of the possible devastating effects that weapons of mass destruction may inflict on humankind. This recognition renews the priority that we must accord the arms control architecture, in general, and that of the Conference on Disarmament, in particular. Second, the pandemic crisis underlines the importance of joint international efforts to overcome a common threat faced by the world. This recognition has convinced us that now is the time for international bodies like the Conference on Disarmament to be infused with the spirit of cooperation rather than one of division.

In this regard, I fully agree with you, Mr. President, that member States should focus on what unites us more than what divides us. We believe that the widely shared perceptions emerging from the pandemic crisis help to highlight the importance of the Conference and the expectation that it will achieve its mandate and produce tangible outcomes.

Unfortunately, we do not have much time remaining in the current session, yet we strive to do our best so that the work of the Conference may be as fruitful as possible, guided by your eminent presidency and backed by the coordination among the presidencies of this session.

The President: I thank Ambassador Ogasawara for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President. I will now give the floor to Ambassador Baumann, representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, first allow me to congratulate Austria and you personally on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of my delegation's full support. I would also like to express our gratitude for the diligent manner in which you are performing your task. We are grateful for your efforts in enabling the Conference to meet again, despite the constraints imposed on us. And I too would like to welcome to Geneva the new Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia.

The resumption of the Conference's activities after a suspension of several months is opportune and welcome for several reasons. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis is global in its scope and has shown the extent to which multilateral institutions are crucial to our collective health, prosperity and security. That is why it is important that we find answers to the practical issues arising from the pandemic regarding multilateral processes,

to help them regain all their effectiveness. We must be both creative and pragmatic in order to meet the challenge of the full resumption of activities while respecting public health requirements. Ad hoc solutions will be required according to the different types of processes and forums, and we are happy that the Conference is showing the way forward in this regard. The resumption of the activities of the Conference, the main disarmament forum of the multilateral system, also appears important in the light of many worrying developments in the area of international security. We are particularly concerned by the progressive deterioration in the global arms control architecture and the fact that this tendency has continued during the spring. Special efforts must be made to reverse the trend and work to reinforce this multilateral architecture.

More specifically, we call upon the parties directly concerned to renew without delay the New START, whose expiration would remove not only the last remaining limitations on the size of nuclear arsenals, but would also risk having a direct impact on other instruments such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its upcoming Review Conference. In view of the various rumours that have circulated in recent weeks concerning nuclear tests, a quick entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is more important today than ever. In this regard, we would like to recall the commitment made by all States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty under action 10 of the 2010 action plan, i.e. that all nuclear-weapon States undertake to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty with all expediency.

Before ending, I would like to thank the outgoing presidency of the Conference, Australia, for its exemplary commitment throughout the spring. We regret that the programme of thematic activities it wanted to organize could not take place. We listened with great interest to the briefing this morning by Ambassador Mansfield on the consultations she held on ways to overcome the deadlock affecting the Conference. These consultations seem to have helped identify considerations that should be kept in mind if we want the Conference to make progress.

In this regard, I would mention the following points in particular: it is unlikely that the Conference will be in a position to launch negotiations on a legally binding instrument in the short term. Nonetheless, it has several options open to it to move forward and contribute once again to strengthening international security. Working organically from the bottom up rather than maintaining the all-or-nothing approach that has long prevailed is one highly promising option. This would enable us to discover important topics and identify possible options to address them, whether these are finally developed by the Conference or other bodies. The possibility of developing politically binding norms is another option before the Conference, which would allow it to contribute materially to the global security architecture in view of the role that such instruments play in many areas. As the briefing highlighted, such approaches are fully compatible with the mandate that the Conference received at the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and with our rules of procedure.

With these few remarks, I have not of course done justice to the briefing on the consultations held by the Australian presidency. Given their scope, we think it would be particularly helpful to record the result of the consultations in an official document of the Conference. This would give us food for thought as we continue our considerations on the subject.

The very last point that I would like to raise concerns the proposal to amend the rules of procedure to address the fact that the presidency of the Conference can apparently be held only by a man. We fully support this technical proposal which should in fact have been implemented long ago. It would be difficult to understand if this was not soon put into practice.

Mr. President, I will end with these considerations and thank you for your attention.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Baumann for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to Ambassador De Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão from Brazil.

Mr. De Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (Brazil): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, let me congratulate you, not only on assuming the presidency, but also for all the efforts you have already deployed even prior to this meeting for the sake of the success of the Conference on Disarmament. Your contacts, both bilaterally and with several regional and like-minded groups, have been of paramount importance to the good start of our work in the middle of this pandemic.

I also want to commend the Australian delegation for all its efforts during the past month, which helped to shed some light on the different expectations that we may have for this 2020 session.

I give my warmest welcome to our new colleagues from Argentina, Tunisia and the Republic of Korea. I trust that they will surely contribute most positively for the best development of our work.

Mr. President, Brazil is part of that region of the world from where, as Ambassador Alfaro Espinosa of Peru remarked, all nuclear weapons have been banned. In my country, this is furthermore a constitutional mandate. So, Mr. President, in Latin America and the Caribbean, nuclear disarmament is already an *acquis* and we very much hope that other regions of the world will soon adopt the same approach – building a path for the rest of the world to arrive at that same point.

We are here, Mr. President, constantly turning around very simple and very clear words: denuclearization, disarmament, non-proliferation. We all know what they mean and we all know what they should bring to us but we keep turning round and round. Perhaps, Mr. President, we should start to turn around another couple of words, which are these: political will.

We have heard today from almost all the delegations, including those of the most powerfully armed countries, about denuclearization, disarmament and non-proliferation, but very few words about the political will to achieve those objectives. My delegation hopes that, under your wise conduct, something in that direction might be explored.

As for the development of our work, Brazil, as many here, favours the urgent adoption of a programme of work. We also believe that all Conference on Disarmament themes are of equal relevance with regard to security and disarmament. Nonetheless, we think that the discussion on some specific issues may have a special urgency and I name them: negative security assurances, cybersecurity, prevention of an arms race in outer space, a treaty on fissile materials, including current stocks, and a treaty that prohibits the performance of anti-satellite tests in outer space. We believe, Mr. President, that this Conference has one, single mandate and that is to negotiate and nothing else. This is why many of us here have talked about two decades of paralysis. We did not negotiate and as long as we do not negotiate, we fail our single mandate. That is why we believe that everything here that is not negotiation only makes sense if it is something that concretely leads towards negotiation. Everything else only prolongs our failure of the last 20 years.

Finally, Mr. President, we observed very rightfully at the opening of this session a minute of silence in memory of those that have died because of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In 2019, more than 150,000 people died of conflicts around the world and, in 2020, this number has already reached around 40,000. And this is without considering the millions – millions, Mr. President – of people tragically displaced by wars. A virus, we cannot prevent, but wars we should be able to. So, Mr. President, I think that this Conference on Disarmament should perhaps adopt the habit of always opening its sessions with a minute of silence in honour of all those that death harvests in wars, so that we have those people always before our face while they are dying out there and we are seated here.

The President: I thank Ambassador De Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President. I will now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to join my colleagues in congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support during your presidency. The resumption of our activities today is attributable to the joint efforts of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, including you, Ambassador.

Mr. President, since we are holding this plenary meeting after a long pause, we are focusing on how to bring the Conference on Disarmament back to work so that it can fulfil its responsibility as a multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. Pointing fingers at a specific member State or bringing up issues irrelevant to global disarmament leads us nowhere in our deliberations but will further increase mistrust and aggravate confrontation among the members.

Even though we convened today's plenary meeting after difficult circumstances due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, instead of focusing on main agenda, countries like Montenegro, at the very beginning of this meeting, tried to instigate confrontation and division by singling out an individual country and abused this forum for other purposes. Such practice will surely obstruct our efforts to start substantive work.

In particular, it is regrettable that the South Korean representative spoke in his statement of an inter-Korean issue, which has no relevance to the Conference on Disarmament agenda. Even though this was his first day at a Conference on Disarmament meeting, he intentionally brought up this issue, which makes me believe that the South Korean authorities are trying to evade responsibility for the recent deterioration in the situation on the Korean Peninsula and transfer their responsibility to the other party. If the South Korean representative is truly committed to the work of the Conference on Disarmament as he discharges his duty, he should first have a correct understanding of the role of this forum and should not raise issues that are irrelevant to the Conference mandate and could distract us from our deliberations on the key agenda items.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement and his kind words addressed to the President. I see we have a few more speakers who have requested the floor for a second time. I will give the floor first to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Omar (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. I have requested the floor to respond to some insinuations made by the delegation of India today. It is unfortunate but hardly surprising that India has chosen once again to deflect the many serious issues raised by my delegation. That country's deflection strategy has a purpose and context. Let there be no mistake, India is desperate to divert attention and escape international scrutiny of its deliberate defiance of international law in occupying Jammu and Kashmir. While India may wish otherwise, the facts mentioned by my delegation are relevant to the work of this body and are based on ground realities and actual developments. Can the Indian delegation deny or justify any of the statements made by its leadership which were recalled by my delegation earlier today or any of the following additional remarks?

The Prime Minister of India, on 21 April 2019, in Barmer, Rajasthan, said at a public rally that his country's nuclear weapons are not for celebrating Diwali, a Hindu festival which also involves fireworks and pyrotechnics, while boasting that India had the capability to launch nuclear attacks from land, sea and air. Yet again, on 22 April 2019, addressing an election rally at Patan, in his home state of Gujarat, the Indian Prime Minister said that he was ready to launch 12 missiles on Pakistan in a *qatal ki raat*, literally, a night of bloodshed, in reference to the February 2019 misadventure by India. Earlier this year, on 29 January 2020, the Indian Prime Minister said in a speech that India's armed forces would not take more than 7 to 10 days to make Pakistan bite the dust. This is the kind of irresponsible rhetoric and statements that have a direct bearing on issues of peace and security, as do the nuclear arms that the Indian leadership brandishes and threatens to use. Let me remind the Indian delegation that the Conference on Disarmament is not an echo chamber of denial and deflection. It has a duty to take note of these dangerous statements that imperil regional peace and security in South Asia.

Mr. President, these statements are as a window onto the mind of the belligerent and fascist leaders of India. This Indian psyche of hegemonic ambitions and obsession with Pakistan was again on full display when, on 14 October 2019, the Deputy Chief Minister of that country's most populous state, Mr. Keshav Prasad Maurya, of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, while campaigning for elections in the state of Maharashtra, said that, if people press the lotus symbol, the election symbol of the Bharatiya Janata Party, it will mean a nuclear bomb has been automatically dropped on Pakistan. Not to be outdone, the Indian Army Chief, General Manoj Naravane, in January this year, declared his force's readiness to invade and annex Azad Jammu and Kashmir pending parliamentary approval.

Mr. President, the Indian delegation did not address these facts and, as expected, went into a self-serving tirade. While speeches can attempt to be circuitous, South Asia is all too familiar with the consequences of India's continued hegemonic aggression against all its neighbours and the people of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. It is precisely to smokescreen its reign of repression against the people of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir that India resorts to these baseless allegations of so-called cross-border terrorism. Pakistan strongly rejects these self-serving and groundless assertions. This is an all too familiar Indian ploy to externalize blame. India cannot, by repeatedly parroting the canard of terrorism, delegitimize the indigenous struggle of the people of Kashmir for their inalienable right to self-determination. Nor can such tactics, unilateral and illegal actions by India unwrite the dozen United Nations Security Council resolutions promising Kashmiris their right to self-determination. Contrary to what may work for domestic consumption in India, Jammu and Kashmir is neither an integral part of India, nor is it India's internal matter. In accordance with the United Nations Security Council resolutions, it remains an internationally recognized disputed territory whose final status is to be decided through a United Nations-supervised plebiscite. The United Nations Security Council has met on no less than three occasions during the last 10 months to address this matter, recognizing the threat posed by India to international peace and security and regional stability in South Asia. These meetings amply debunk the mantra that occupied Jammu and Kashmir is an internal matter of India.

Also, there simply is no justification for targeting innocent civilians in Azad Kashmir through indiscriminate and unprovoked shelling across the line of control. Rather than churning out the deceitful rhetoric of cross-border terrorism, India must cease the State terrorism that it has been perpetrating for decades against the Kashmiri people in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Its tactics of obfuscation and deflection in bringing up the claim of being a victim of terrorism goes against all the established facts. Its leaders are on record affirming the use of terrorism against Pakistan.

Mr. President, this Indian policy of using proxies and financing terrorist groups to destabilize the region has a face. And that face is Indian Navy Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav, its face is Davinder Singh, its face is Venumadhav Dogara, and there are many others awaiting designation by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities.

Mr. President, let me also unmask the Indian sophistry that its security interests transcend the regional or subregional context. If this assertion were to be taken at its face value, would the Indian delegation inform this body why overwhelming numbers of its conventional and non-conventional capabilities remain deployed against Pakistan? Contrary to such claims, India has an expressed and long-standing policy of destabilizing and fomenting trouble in all countries of the region. This is precisely what India would like the international community to forget, with these fictitious claims. And this is yet another testament to India's disingenuous behaviour.

Mr. President, the gratuitous claims made by India about its support for a fissile material cut-off treaty have been addressed previously by my delegation. However, for the record, I will recall some facts. After amassing tonnes of unsafeguarded fissile material as a so-called strategic reserve, directly aided and abetted by discriminatory reviews from the Nuclear Suppliers Group and nuclear cooperation agreements with many major supplier countries, India can continue grandstanding by maintaining a declaratory position in favour of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

For Pakistan, that position continues to ring hollow. If India claims to support the proposed treaty, then why does it insist on basing it on the restrictive Shannon Mandate? Why is it unwilling to include existing stocks in the scope of the treaty in a manner that would genuinely contribute to global and regional stability as well as to nuclear disarmament - which, apparently, India also claims to support? In fact, India is the strongest opponent of extending the scope of the future treaty in a manner that encompasses existing stocks, in order to perpetuate prevailing asymmetries in South Asia to its permanent strategic advantage.

Also, unlike the other nuclear arms States that favour the commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, India has neither declared a unilateral moratorium nor ceased the production of fissile material. This is so because India directly

benefits from the current situation that it is disingenuously blaming on Pakistan. It continues to increase its fissile material stocks and is building new fast breeder reactors, which will exponentially add to its unsafeguarded fissile material production, while maintaining a declaratory position that is the complete opposite. If ceasing national production was a gauge of good faith towards the start of fissile material cut-off treaty negotiations, India fails to fulfil that condition on all accounts.

The position of Pakistan on a fissile material treaty is guided by our national security interests. The treaty should provide undiminished security for all States, a principle recognized by the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament. It should contribute both to the objective of nuclear disarmament and to non-proliferation in all its aspects. The way the treaty is currently envisaged under the Shannon Mandate, it affects Pakistan disproportionately. We therefore have been compelled to oppose such negotiations as they will be detrimental to our vital national security interests. Other countries in similar situations take the exact same position in the Conference on Disarmament on issues that prejudice their national security.

Mr. President, we would also call on India to refrain from these self-serving and hollow declarations, which may please constituencies back home or perpetuate jaundiced media narratives, but do not convince this Conference, which can see through the pretensions now. The Indian delegation would be well-advised to introspect, set its own house in order and eschew diversions, deflection and distractions.

The President: I thank the representative of Pakistan for his additional statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China, Ambassador Song.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to take the floor again. I am making this statement in exercise of the right of reply. I should like to express our strong opposition to and firm rejection of the series of baseless accusations just levelled against China in the statement by the Ambassador of the United States of America. The malicious attacks and groundless accusations made by the United States against China concerning the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic are nothing more than an attempt to use doubletalk to shirk their own international and domestic responsibility to combat the pandemic.

In the past six months, China has already on numerous occasions fully called out the United States for its mendacity before the World Health Organization and many other international forums. We recently issued a very lengthy white paper that set out a comprehensive presentation of the actions taken by our country against the COVID-19 pandemic. I think our colleagues here, and the broader international community, already have a complete understanding of this situation, so I do not intend to waste more time describing it. What I would like to emphasize is that people have already seen the botched ploys by the United States in its attempts to pass the buck, and that the lies and deceit of the United States fool no one. The United States cannot fool the people; it will only be fooling itself. What has the Chinese Government done to protect its people and make a contribution to the worldwide effort to counter the pandemic? And what has the Government of the United States done to protect its people, and what has it done for the world? I think public opinion and the views of history will tell. If the statement by the United States Ambassador to the Conference takes up the COVID-19 pandemic with the objective of smearing China in an attempt to prop up baseless accusations against our country on the nuclear disarmament issue, that would only be all the more ridiculous.

It is well known that the United States pursues a policy of unilateralism and exceptionalism. It has withdrawn from a series of important international security and arms control treaties, actions that in themselves constitute “weapons of mass destruction”, actions that have brought the bilateral system for nuclear disarmament between the United States and the Russian Federation to the brink of collapse, at the same time wiping out any international credibility for the United States. The so-called “trilateral arms control talks between the United States, the Russian Federation and China” proposed by the United States is no more than a pretext for that country to shirk its nuclear disarmament responsibilities and obligations and to seek the deployment of a strategic force in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. From the outset, China has expressed its firm opposition, for a very simple reason: the United States, as the superpower possessing the largest and most advanced nuclear arsenal, must assume specific and primary responsibility for a drastic reduction in its nuclear arsenal. This has been a long-standing, common understanding in

the international community. The disarmament debt owed to the entire world by the United States cannot be blown away by simply uttering the words “post-bilateral world”. Arms control is not a child’s game and is no place for cheap tricks. The world will not be fooled by a fake photo as a cover for the “Vienna trilateral dialogue”. We urge the United States to respond earnestly to the Russian proposal for the extension of the new START and to continue its commitment to a drastic reduction of its own nuclear arsenal so as to create the conditions required for the multilateral nuclear arms control and disarmament process.

I would like to emphasize that, in terms of both nuclear policy and the size of nuclear arsenals, China and the United States are not comparable. China is not the United States, and it will not pursue the nuclear policy of the United States. The Chinese nuclear capability is limited and entirely defensive in nature, it does not target any country and we will not take part in any nuclear arms race. China has never shirked its international responsibilities and obligations and is willing to engage actively in dialogue and cooperation with all parties in the Conference, the P5 mechanism and other United Nations arms control mechanisms and to jointly promote international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation processes.

In his statement just now, the United States Ambassador referred to the personal views of the editor-in-chief of a Chinese newspaper. He cited those words as proof and asked me for an explanation. This is absolutely laughable. First of all, the personal views of an editor-in-chief obviously cannot represent the arms control policy of China and we resolutely oppose any attempt to use them to level unwarranted attacks against the modernization of our country’s national defence. Secondly, judging from the editor-in-chief’s words, he was addressing the hostility and threats made against China by some United States politicians, which precisely reflected the general concern of the Chinese public, and also the broader international public, the essence of which was precisely to show the serious, pernicious effects of the deep-seated cold-war mentality of certain persons in the United States. A cold-war mentality cannot “make America great again” and all the more so cannot bring security to the world. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his additional statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for an additional statement as well.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. In reaction to the United States representative’s statement, I should say that these repeated diatribes and deflections will not fool the international community. And of course, the United States representative is very skilled in distracting the Conference on Disarmament from its main mandate, even by resorting to all kinds of absurdities. The United States Ambassador echoed the top criminal Bryan Hook, threatening that the United States would intensify maximum pressure unless and until Iran agrees to negotiate. For God’s sake, please, just think about this arrogant and disingenuous proposition. Negotiate with whom? For what purpose? Are we going to negotiate to end where we are right now? You trashed an agreement negotiated at length with the United States Government at that time and with five other nations, the European Union and others. You reimposed inhuman unlawful sanctions only to force Iran to talk to you. If this is not a definition of an outlaw system of governance, what other word or phrase should we really employ to describe it?

The United States representatives named my country a rogue State, and I think I should, at least once, discuss with this august body which regime is really rogue. The United States is definitely a rogue regime by any standard and certainly by the same standard they are applying to others. A rogue State is one that is obsessively engaged in the business of killing other people and destroying their property, including by promiscuous sale of weapons. Tell me which State is the supreme seller of weaponry in today’s world? Who are your clients? How and where are these weapons used? Since World War II, the United States military has killed or helped kill some 20 million people; overthrown at least 36 governments; interfered in at least 85 foreign elections; attempted to assassinate over 50 foreign leaders; and dropped bombs and people in over 30 countries. The United States is responsible for the death of millions of people in Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia and over 1 million just in 2003 in Iraq. Since 2001, the United States had been systematically destroying a region of the globe; bombing Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Syria.

Under the current administration, the United States has intensified its involvement in the business of actively creating or deepening threats to humanity: capsizing the climate; pardoning United States soldiers and military contractors convicted of war crimes; institutionalizing impunity for the most serious crimes of an international nature by sanctioning the International Criminal Court through an executive order on 11 June; and supplying arms to the most destabilizing malign actors across the globe so that they can bombard and massacre innocent people. A rogue State is the one whose brand is crisis – ranging from unsatiated lust for war and aggression or military intervention to the remaking of whole societies under the pretext of exporting democracy and coups d'état. The rogue State is the one that abides by treaties and agreements only if it feels like it, with no respect for the system of diplomacy and international law that underpin them. And that fits exactly with the United States long pattern of invoking resolution 2231 to rebuke Iran, although they trashed the resolution altogether three years ago. That is the height of hypocrisy.

The rogue State is the one with institutionalized supremacist ideologies, systematic racism, racial discrimination, police brutality and knee-on-the-neck policy at home plus unilateral coercion and State terrorism abroad. The rogue State is the only user of nuclear weapons. The rogue power is the one that proliferates smaller rogue actors and rogue clients to act as its proxy to wreak havoc in many parts of the globe. We have two of them in our region right now: one that has been actively creating chaos and violence and devouring lands and territories for the past seven decades; and the other one is destabilizing and destroying countries in its vicinity and afar and killing and maiming innocent kids.

I think, Mr. President, that all who care for a secure and peaceful international law should urge this bullying actor to act like a normal State.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his additional remarks. I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Choi Soonhee (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Mr. President. I am taking the floor again to respond to the remarks made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our principle and position on the issue of Korean Peninsula very briefly. We strongly believe that peaceful means, such as dialogue and diplomacy, are the only way to achieve genuine and lasting peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. Bearing in mind the goal of complete denuclearization and the establishment of lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula agreed by the leaders of the two Koreas and the United States, we urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to heed the calls of the international community and to refrain from actions that may aggravate the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

The President: I thank the representative of the Republic of Korea for her additional remarks. I now give the floor to the United States of America, who will speak remotely.

Mr. Wood (United States) (*spoke via video link*): Thank you, Mr. President. My apologies for taking the floor but I need to exercise my right of reply.

Let me first start with the comments from the Chinese Ambassador. He, of course, rejects my statement but all the world clearly knows that China was the country that could have taken steps to prevent the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis that we have. Transparency is not that country's strong point. Authoritarian regimes are not known for their transparency but they are known for their lies and cover-ups. China is engaged in a huge nuclear build-up and is expected to more than double its strategic nuclear forces over the next ten years. China has refused to answer messages from the United States Government. In December, we proposed to have a dialogue with China on arms control and risk reduction. China has yet to give an answer, and we need to ask why. Why is China afraid to have a conversation with the United States on the issue of arms control? It is puzzling to us. All Chinese media, as most of us know, are State controlled. If you make a statement in a newspaper that does not coincide with the governing views of the Chinese Communist Party, you end up in a lot of trouble. But my question, and the question has not been answered, is whether China is in the process of developing an additional 1,000 nuclear warheads. Show us some transparency. China has taken advantage of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty over the years to develop a fleet of intermediate range missiles that threaten its neighbours and United States forces in the region. I do not know

what more to say to my Chinese colleague except that China is developing a nuclear arsenal that is a major threat to international peace and security. It claims it wants to be a responsible player; China should come to the table – it had the opportunity on 22 June to sit down with Russia and the United States, but it refused to. It keeps using the same excuse: “Our arsenal is very, very small.” Your arsenal is growing and there is no transparency. And the world wants some transparency from China. We have seen the example of what happens when there is no transparency. We have seen it through the spread of the coronavirus disease.

With regard to Iran, a leading State sponsor of terror, a leading hostage-taking nation: it is a terrorist regime and has no credibility. It is in no position to criticize any country for anything. But know this: the United States will continue its maximum pressure campaign on the regime in Tehran. We will severely restrict your ability to fund terror around the world. And our hope is that, one day, you will give up your ways and come to the table and address the issues that are of concern, not just the nuclear issue but the funding of terror, ballistic missile proliferation and other behaviour that is of concern, not only to my country but to other countries around the world.

The President: I thank Ambassador Wood for his additional remarks, and I see we have one additional request for the floor. In the interest of time, I would appeal to any speakers now to be as concise as possible. I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea): Mr. President, the South Korean representative has again tried to draw our attention to a bilateral issue. And I would rather not engage in an issue of a bilateral nature. The representative of South Korea, before complaining about anything, should look back over the past two years to see what her country has done since signing the inter-Korean agreement; and they have no right to talk about denuclearization.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China, who has requested the floor for a second time.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you Mr. President. I do not think I need to spend much time refuting the attacks made once again by the United States Ambassador against China, as the position I explained earlier has already addressed his questions. The nuclear strategy pursued by China for many years is already an answer to the slanderous, smearing and vilifying question he raised as to whether the nuclear capability of China has become a major threat to international peace and security. I think that, in the minds of the people of every country in the world, it is very clear which State poses the greatest actual threat to international peace and security: the one with the security strategy, the hegemony, the most advanced and largest nuclear arsenal and the one that engages most in bullying tactics.

A moment ago I emphasized that the limited nuclear capacity of China is completely defensive in nature and is not targeted against any country. Any country that has no intention to threaten or harm our country’s sovereignty, security or territorial integrity will not be threatened by the defence forces of China and should not perceive such a threat, unless that country itself has ulterior motives.

Lastly, in response to the malicious attacks levelled once again against China by the United States Ambassador in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would like to again express my strong rejection and opposition. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his additional remarks. No other speakers have requested the floor, so it seems that we have come to the end of our plenary today.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, before we conclude our business for today, let me also once again warmly invite all of you to a virtual civil society event that will be held on Friday, 3 July, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, entitled “Conference on Disarmament meets civil society – Lessons of the pandemic: rethinking the nexus between disarmament and security”. The event is intended to enhance the dialogue between States and civil society. Maybe it will help us to think a little bit outside the usual Conference on Disarmament box. I encourage all of you to register for the event.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I wish to thank you all for your flexibility and the support that I have received throughout the last couple of weeks, during our presidency. It was indeed encouraging to see the willingness of delegations to resume the work of the Conference on Disarmament, despite these very difficult circumstances. I think that is a testimony to our seriousness, professionalism and responsibility.

The topics of the Conference on Disarmament go to the very heart of international security. The discussions might sometimes not be easy, but it is the responsibility of us all to promote dialogue in the most constructive possible manner. We heard from Ambassador Mansfield at the beginning of our meeting and I think it was very useful to have that synopsis of the consultations held during the Australian presidency. Many of you have referred to Ambassador Mansfield's statement; I have been told that Australia will, via the secretariat, upload a more detailed analysis of this assessment or survey, which will be very helpful. I think that some of you indicated that it could constitute a basis for future work and deliberations of the Conference. It addressed many issues and I think we should really try to build on it from now on. We are coming slowly to the end of the Austrian presidency. It is my hope that the next generation of Austrians, maybe my colleague sitting behind me, will preside over the Conference on Disarmament in 10 years from now and be able to look back and see that progress has been achieved; hopefully she will preside over a fully operational Conference on Disarmament that is fulfilling its negotiating mandate. I was inspired by the Ambassador of Spain, who said that he wakes up every morning with a lot of optimism; I too believe in good and that we should strive to progress.

This has been a very unique setting. You are all familiar with the facilities we have in other rooms, working under different circumstances; I would like to take this opportunity to thank the secretariat, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the United Nations Office at Geneva for their commitment in making this possible. It has not been very easy and has taken a lot of effort on the part of our colleagues in the secretariat and UNODA, the staff of the conference services and the interpreters. I know it is much more challenging to interpret remotely or when people are wearing facemasks. I hope that one day we can all go back to work in our traditional format; that is not yet possible, unfortunately, but let us hope for the best. It has, however, been an achievement just to be able to talk to all of you. I have learned a lot in these consultations and talks and I was really impressed by the enormous positive response and willingness to go back to work.

So, as I said we are slowly coming to the end of our presidency but of course, we will continue to work very closely with the following presidencies, of Bangladesh and of Belarus. We will put our heads together now and consider the next steps. I understand there is a great deal of interest in seeing how we will structure the rest of the work. It is a collective effort by the six Presidents of the 2020 session, and will remain so. Our colleague from Belgium will have the pleasure of sitting here in the not so distant future; you can count on our support in preparing your presidency. It has been a tremendous learning curve for me to work in the framework of the six Presidents of the current session. So once again, thank you all for your flexibility. I think everything has worked relatively well; the arrangements may not have been perfect, but everybody has made an effort, and we clearly value the importance of substantive discussions over simply following what we are used to.

So I thank you very much for your willingness to be flexible and show pragmatism. And if we could transfer this flexibility and pragmatism and maybe the political will, in addition, into the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament, I would be very optimistic that the next generation of diplomats might be able to look back at some glorious success stories. However, we are not there yet; I know we have to face political realities but I have a few more days left in the presidency, my phone line and my email and the contact details of my delegation will always remain open and we will continue to work with the next presidencies.

I would once again to thank the secretariat and the staff of UNODA and the United Nations Office at Geneva for all their help. We have learned a lot in this test phase. With that, I adjourn the meeting.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.