

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference, on Tuesday, 19 January 2021, at 3 p.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium)



The President: I call to order the 1549th meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Good afternoon, dear colleagues. Thank you for reconvening this afternoon. I would like to first welcome the representatives of the non-member States whose request to participate in the Conference has been accepted and who have now joined us on this platform.

I would also like to welcome two new colleagues who are with us this afternoon – that is, Her Excellency Ms. Meirav Eilon Shahar of Israel and His Excellency Mr. Héctor Constant Rosales of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. A warm welcome to both of you. I look forward to working with you.

Now we will continue. And I would first like to give the floor to Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Conference.

Ms. Valovaya (Secretary-General to the Conference on Disarmament): Thank you. Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to address you at the opening of this year's Conference on Disarmament. Let me start by wishing all of you a happy and healthy new year.

I followed attentively the proceedings this morning and I am disappointed that the Conference has started this way.

As a general principle, exclusion undermines the fundamental concept of multilateralism. However, I still maintain high hopes for the 2021 session.

Ladies and gentlemen, the determination demonstrated by the member States of the Conference to hold meetings – even in 2020, despite the less than ideal format – is testament to their willingness to use all opportunities to bring forward the important issues on the agenda of the Conference. I hope that this same determination will contribute to substantive outcomes at the 2021 session, shepherded and supported by the six Presidents of this session.

Indeed, I am pleased to see that the spirit of cooperation between the six Presidents that marked the last session of the Conference continues today through their successors. While decision-making rests, equally, with each Conference member, working in unity can only facilitate your deliberations. The intense collaboration between the six Presidents of 2021 has already allowed for an early circulation of a draft package proposal prior to the formal start of this session, kick-starting your work and, I am sure, discussions on what can or should be achieved by the Conference this year.

This package includes a draft for a programme of work, a draft outline for its implementation and a presidential statement on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. In its essence, it could provide a framework for the work of the Conference throughout this year – structuring discussions, offering an opportunity to jointly delve into agenda items, and explore specific aspects – moving beyond general statements. At this juncture, I see great value in the achievement of these objectives.

For years, we considered the system of norms in nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control an *acquis*. That very system of norms is instead crumbling before our eyes. In the past few years, we have seen a continuous negative trend which you must urgently reverse. All States bear the responsibility to make maximum use of all multilateral forums and other channels to stop this negative trend as well as to build trust and confidence among nations.

In this Conference, which is the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum for the international community, it is time to move away from exchanges that do not contribute to substantive issues on the agenda of the Conference or that, worse, feed the prevailing trust deficit, taking you further away from building a conducive environment for successful negotiations. Likewise, there is an urgent need for renewed dialogue that moves beyond the affirmation of already known national positions and that addresses the key substantive issues on which States must focus to make progress.

The subsidiary bodies that would be established through the adoption of this package could provide the much-needed space for renewed dialogue in the Conference on specific

topics of its agenda, whose items include some of the most pressing issues in global disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly. This resolution, entitled “Establishment of a Commission to Deal with the Problems Raised by the Discovery of Atomic Energy”, sought, among other things, proposals for the “elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction”.

Seventy-five years later, and despite unquestionable progress in the reduction of nuclear arsenals, this is still an unfinished task. There is an urgent need to recommit to these principles and take urgent measures to implement the resolution. Despite divergences, even entrenchments, in your positions on ways to address these issues, I trust that you will find the means to bring them forward. The Conference on Disarmament, at its 2021 session, could offer the adequate space to bring forward discussions on these topics.

The General Assembly, upon recommendation of its First Committee, just passed more than 60 resolutions, of which 19 make specific reference to the Conference on Disarmament. The Secretary-General has, as usual, transmitted to the Conference the list of these resolutions. With respect to the core items on the agenda of the Conference, this included a new request for its members to inform the Conference of their national space security policies, strategies or doctrines, on a voluntary basis. Although the Conference on Disarmament and the General Assembly are different forums, the disarmament and international security issues dealt with in both bodies are similar and overlap, and the 65 delegations that participate in both forums represent the same national security interests in both venues.

As 2020 challenged us all in all aspects of our professional and personal lives, it is natural to look at this year with a sense of momentous expectation – including in the field of disarmament. This year will be marked by important events for the global nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control regimes. There will be the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in just a few days, and the postponed Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is scheduled to take place this summer. The preparations for the review conferences of the parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and to the Biological Weapons Convention will also take place this year. In this sense, the hardest challenges but also the greatest opportunities lie ahead of us.

I hope that the members of the Conference on Disarmament will be inspired by the critical significance of these events and will find the sense of urgency necessary to contribute to their success and reverse the dangerous trends witnessed over the past few years. There is no doubt that what has been missing in this Conference is neither substantive knowledge on the part of its members nor worthy subjects but rather the political will to build on them.

Ladies and gentlemen, here at the Palais des Nations, business may not return to normal in the near term. It is likely that as the epidemiological situation continues to be serious, several constraints on our ability to meet in person will remain throughout the first half of 2021. The financial realities of the Organization will also continue to be a challenging reality. I am, however, strongly committed to supporting you in your important work to the extent possible. I took note of the requests for further information on the financing of conference servicing at the United Nations Office at Geneva, and my colleagues in the Conference on Disarmament secretariat and the Office have answered several of your queries, in various formats. We stand ready to continue to do so, including through pointed information notes on financial, conferencing and logistical issues to address all your queries.

I wish you all success in your work. Thank you.

The President: I thank Ms. Valovaya for her statement. Please allow me now to make my statement in my capacity as President of the Conference on Disarmament.

(spoke in French)

Madam Secretary-General, dear colleagues, I would first like to convey my best wishes for the new year to you and your families. Since we are unfortunately unable to meet

at the Palais des Nations because of the current public health context, my wish for the new year is that we be able to resume our work in person as soon as possible. In the meantime, I thank you for your understanding and flexibility with respect to the virtual format that we have been obliged to adopt. I would like to thank Ms. Valovaya for her statement and her rousing call to break the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament, a call that I fully echo. I also thank her for her welcome support for the proposed document package circulated by the six Presidents of the session and, more generally, for our work.

Dear colleagues, the health crisis that we have been living through for the past year, coupled with the major security, climate, societal and economic challenges we are facing, is a reminder of the extent to which we are interconnected and able to effectively solve transnational problems only by cooperating and combining our individual efforts for the common good. The crisis underscores our vulnerabilities. It highlights our collective shortcomings and, above all, reveals the urgent need for robust and renewed multilateralism.

Disarmament, too, requires robust and renewed multilateralism. The current security situation remains complex, and plans are still too often driven by mistrust. More than ever, it is essential that we manage to move forward together in a climate of cooperation and renewed trust and demonstrate that we are up to the task of facing the collective challenges before us.

The Conference, as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament, must step into its role as the driving force – all the more so this year, which is marked, first, by the important termination date of an instrument for strategic nuclear arms control involving the United States of America and the Russian Federation, second, by the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and, third, by a worrying deterioration in certain aspects of nuclear proliferation. A breakthrough in the Conference on Disarmament would help create positive momentum that would set the tone for the months to come.

My country has the honour to open this session of the Conference as this year begins, and it does so with a firm determination to move forward – despite the obstacles – and with a call for all parties to play their part. My team and I stand ready to work tirelessly towards our shared success.

Dear colleagues, the six States that will occupy the presidency of the Conference this year – namely, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chile and, of course, my country, Belgium – have chosen to continue with the innovative and collaborative model put forward by the six Presidents last year, a model that is especially deserving of praise. Like the six Presidents of last year's session, we have chosen to combine our efforts and develop a common vision for a programme of work for the Conference so that there will be greater coherence and continuity between presidencies this session – a vision rooted in a realistic understanding of national interests but also fuelled by a heightened desire to see the Conference move forward and fulfil its mandate for a safer and more secure world.

The six Presidents, still following the model put in place last year, will hold weekly consultations with China, which will hold the first 2022 presidency, and Belarus, the holder of the last 2020 presidency. A notable feature of the group formed by the six Presidents of the current session, the last President of the previous session and the first President of the next session is that it represents all the regional groups of the Conference. It therefore has the potential, because of its diversity and the wide range of viewpoints represented within it, to act as a driving force in moving our work forward. Over the last few months, in preparing for this session, I have held a series of bilateral consultations and, together with the other five Presidents of the 2021 session, organized consultations with each of the regional groups. I would like to thank the delegations that have shared with me their insightful advice on how best to revive the work of the Conference. These consultations have also given me a sense of how committed delegations are to the Conference and how important it is to preserve its credibility as the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament issues.

With respect to the programme of work, there have been many calls for us not to reinvent the wheel but to build on the foundation laid by the six Presidents of the previous session and, in particular, the package of documents circulated under the Algerian presidency, which many delegations see as the approach most likely to lead to consensus. It was therefore on that basis that the six Presidents of the current session circulated a proposed document

package last month containing, first, a draft programme of work for the Conference, second, a draft decision on the implementation of the programme of work and, third, a draft Presidential statement on increasing the effectiveness and improving the functioning of the Conference.

I thank the delegations that have already commented on the proposed package, and I look forward to beginning our discussions on the proposal with the full membership next week. I will also remain available to any delegations that wish to speak with me about the document package circulated. As true mediators, we will listen to everyone's concerns, but it must also be clear that if we are to achieve consensus, each of us will have to show flexibility.

Finally, in closing, I would like to express my gratitude once again to Ms. Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference, for her welcome support for our work. I would also like to thank Ms. Day, Chief a.i. of the Geneva branch of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, and her entire team for the valuable assistance that they have provided to our presidency thus far. Thank you.

(spoke in English)

I would now like to turn to the list of speakers for today. We will start the list of speakers with the forthcoming Presidents for this year – that is, the colleagues who will succeed me on this podium in the coming months. And the first speaker on my list is the Permanent Representative of Brazil.

Mr. Dalcero (Brazil): First of all, thank you, Ambassador, for the promotion, but I am the Deputy Permanent Special Representative to the Conference on Disarmament. The Ambassador will address the Conference next week.

The President: Brazil, I am sorry to interrupt you, but we have to interrupt you because we cannot hear you. Please reconnect. And we hope it will work later, but, in the meantime, I give the floor to the next speaker, the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Sterk (Bulgaria): Mr. President, Madam Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, dear colleagues, it is a particular privilege for me to address the Conference on Disarmament, the world's sole specialized multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The Republic of Bulgaria is honoured to be part of the group of the year's six Presidents, a form of cooperative work successfully promoted last year by our predecessors. We view this format as providing for consistency and continuity, as well as for a truly comprehensive and flexible approach to all issues we might face.

Today, after more than forty years of the Conference on Disarmament, we do have significant incentives for thorough review and reflection. Until last year, the legacy of the stalemate of previous years continued to shape our discussions for a considerable amount of time. Yet last year, during the Algerian presidency, we were close to a consensus, and the programme of work proposed at that time almost managed to bridge over stereotypes, perceptions and divergences, and brought almost all delegations to agree on a shared approach.

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic certainly affected our work. Nevertheless, we perceive the virtual conduct of our meeting today as yet more proof of the prevailing determination of all Conference member States for the Conference to work and achieve results. What is needed now is a high level of sustained political commitment and the will to seek common ground from all Conference on Disarmament members in order to preserve the relevance of this body and ensure that it delivers again on its mandate.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) remains the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, an essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament, in accordance with its article VI. A successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference in 2021 will depend on our determination and ability to keep alive a pragmatic and constructive spirit in order to advance our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

While we support the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, it is our strong belief that the only feasible way to achieve universal, verifiable and irreversible nuclear

disarmament is through a progressive approach based on practical steps. Tangible progress towards a world without nuclear weapons could be accomplished only by taking into consideration the complex security environment and strategic context as a whole.

The long-awaited entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty would be another important building block in the construction of a world without nuclear weapons. More than twenty years after it was opened for signature, the efforts of the international community are still required for its entry into force. The Republic of Bulgaria, which is an annex 2 State, is among those that have signed and ratified the Treaty. And we call upon all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty without any further delay.

We share the view on the necessity of commencing negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) as soon as possible. We believe that this is the issue that has attained the highest maturity for negotiations, or at least for work conducive to negotiations. The work done by the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group is a serious and forward-looking confirmation of this conviction. It is well understood, of course, that achieving this goal requires taking into account the security concerns and considerations of all States.

Against the background of the current ever-growing international tensions, the Republic of Bulgaria shares the concern over the increasingly volatile security environment. Numerous non-proliferation and disarmament multilateral treaties and forums continue to suffer from a lack of consensus, from stalemates and even from violations. The loss of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which for decades has been of key importance for upholding Euro-Atlantic security, is just another example of the crises of multilateralism. Regrettably, the situation where only the United States abided by the Treaty was not sustainable.

As a co-founder of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and a committed State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Republic of Bulgaria takes on the duty to prevent the use of chemical weapons or chemicals used as weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. As a member of the Executive Council of the Organisation from 2019 to 2021, Bulgaria is sparing no effort to preserve the full and effective implementation of all decisions taken under the Chemical Weapons Convention, including the one adopted by the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties in June 2018.

Last but not least, the important topic of the expansion of the Conference on Disarmament and admission of new members should find an appropriate place in the Conference's discussions. The Republic of Bulgaria is a firm supporter of the enlargement of the Conference and would like to see the Conference on Disarmament membership matching twenty-first century realities and challenges.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we believe the proposal of the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session for a programme of work based on the positive experience during the Algerian presidency last year provides an opportunity to build together the missing links towards a consensual approach in tackling the items on the Conference agenda. The long stalemate proves that only together can we proceed ahead. And I hope we will be capable of learning from our own past experience in order not to be condemned to relive it. There are no easy solutions to complex problems. Nevertheless, we believe these solutions are at hand – we have only to grab them by acting wisely.

I thank you very much for your attention and wish to all of us courage, resolve and unfailing faith to overcome any hurdles we might face. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria.

(spoke in French)

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Cameroon.

Mr. Eheth (Cameroon) *(spoke in French)*: Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. President. It gives me great pleasure to extend to all my colleagues my very best wishes for 2021, a year that we all hope will see the end of the coronavirus disease. At the outset, I would like to thank the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the

Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, for her valuable remarks and commend you, Mr. President, for your insightful words, which provide the direction for our important work. I also support the comments just made by my colleague from Bulgaria. As he said, the COVID-19 pandemic had a serious impact on diplomatic activity in 2020, including the smooth functioning of this Conference.

I would like to welcome the new observer States joining us this morning. I do not wish to dwell on the budget issues and their implications for the future of our meetings, which the Director-General has thoroughly addressed.

Madam Director-General, Mr. President, security issues in particular, and disarmament issues in general, affect the entire world. Weapons of all kinds have been produced thanks to human ingenuity, and they pose a threat to all of humanity. We must apply ourselves, through this Conference, to the search for solutions. Security concerns require a global response and therefore the participation of all States. Disarmament is of great concern to developing countries, as it relates not only to global threats but also to issues that, when taken together with the other difficulties that our States must overcome, further complicate and cast a cloud over the future.

The 2021 session of the Conference, which is beginning today in a particularly difficult context, must bring all of humanity closer to the consensual solutions that all our peoples expect. The package of documents being proposed to us in 2021, which covers issues such as the prevention of an arms race, transparency and the disarmament programme, is in itself a complete programme. Had we been able to continue our discussions properly, we would have made considerable progress towards international peace and security. It is by keeping in mind the objective of peace, through the prevention of an arms race and international cooperation on disarmament, that our Conference will set itself apart. Such an approach is consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to which my country, Cameroon, remains deeply committed. I welcome the considerable efforts made during the previous sessions.

The Conference is an important negotiating platform that adds value to multilateralism to the extent that it highlights the resolve of all actors to work for international peace and cooperation and addresses one of the most sensitive issues facing humanity. Cameroon therefore urges delegations to work to find consensual solutions and allow the discussions on disarmament to culminate in practical responses during the 2021 session.

The discussions and dialogue on the document package allow us to hear voices from all regions of the world and, at the same time, listen to the deep desire for peace that dwells in each of our peoples. Cameroon, like most States of the region – where peace is undermined by various factors, the most widespread being terrorism – has high hopes for our work.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, we are fortunate in that most major weapons of mass destruction are held and controlled by States; we are quite fortunate indeed. That fact is what still safeguards humanity, the environment and the serenity of our peoples.

In closing, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to reaffirm my country's commitment to and support for this Conference and assure the President, Ambassador Pecsteen de Buytswerve, and all our colleagues here today of our wholehearted determination to contribute to the success of our work. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Permanent Representative of Cameroon. I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Canada.

Ms. Norton (Canada): Thank you, Mr. President, and let me begin by welcoming our new colleagues and the observers and send a thank you out to Director-General Valovaya for her presentation to us.

Mr. President, we have been working closely with you and the other members of the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session since last summer in an effort to shape a suitable proposal for the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. The package proposal circulated by the secretariat on 18 December outlines what we believe to be an appropriate framework for pursuing meaningful work in the Conference over this year.

This proposal acknowledges that at present there is no item on the Conference agenda on which all member States are prepared to launch negotiations. Given this reality, the package offers Conference members a fairly intense series of meetings on all of the agenda items, with the goals of clarifying national positions and possible means of advancing to negotiations in one or more areas.

(spoke in French)

While it is true that Canada believes that there are opportunities to begin negotiations on a fissile material treaty, we are open to negotiations on other substantive issues if a consensus on holding them emerges. Within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament, we see no path to achieving consensus among member States on possible negotiations – to putting delegations in a position to bring about such an outcome – other than discussion based on instructions from the decision makers in our capitals. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President *(spoke in French)*: I thank the Permanent Representative of Canada. I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Chile.

Mr. Tressler Zamorano (Chile) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Ambassador of Belgium and President of the Conference, Ms. Radha Day, head of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, dear colleagues and friends, it is a pleasure to see you all virtually and, of course, to extend a warm welcome to the colleagues who have recently taken up their duties in Geneva and who are joining us today.

Mr. President, please allow me, first of all, to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference and to wish you every success in completing the task you have been set. You can count on my country to participate constructively in the Conference's deliberations, specifically as part of the group of the six member States that will occupy the presidency at this session, together with the last member State to do so in the 2020 session and the first to do so in the 2022 session. As this is my first statement at the inaugural meeting of the Conference, allow me to make some brief and specific remarks on the tasks and challenges faced by this body over the past few months, in view of the current exceptional circumstances.

Chile recognizes the Conference as the main forum for negotiating agreements in the field of multilateral disarmament. The successful negotiation of various treaties at the Conference has demonstrated its importance. Precisely because we recognize its history and importance, we are also aware of its shortcomings, as we have stated on previous occasions. Nevertheless, in challenging times such as the present ones, with the pandemic under way, it is worth looking to the principles that underpin our national foreign policy, including our unrestricted commitment to multilateralism, which is the only way to create the conditions of trust that will allow for the consensus we need to make progress towards a world that reflects our ideals of peace and international security.

That is why, in these extraordinary circumstances, Chile once again reiterates its determination to achieve the objectives for which the Conference was established and thereby strengthen, with the help of gestures and concrete actions, the multilateral system, particularly the international security architecture. In that regard, we recognize the clear merit in the approach taken by last year's Presidents, who created a space for common dialogue and understanding that went beyond the temporal and geographical limitations of each of the six annual presidencies considered individually.

In our experience, the so-called group of six Presidents, or group of six Presidents, plus the last President of the previous session and the first of the subsequent session, has been a valuable tool in the Conference's work this year. We thank the Belgian presidency for its initiative and leadership in this regard, and in particular for its presentation of the proposal of work and the package on behalf of the 2021 presidencies. We sincerely hope that, this year, we will achieve the consensus that we all long for.

The proposal put forward is based on last year's work, in particular the proposal that, in our view, best reflected the delicate balance between the interests, views and red lines

expressed by member States' delegations – that is, the proposal of the delegation of Algeria. Building on that proposal, especially its constructive spirit, we have tried to formulate one that takes due account of the current context and the constraints it places on us.

We also acknowledge, Mr. President, the consultations that you and your team have conducted in order to arrive at a successful outcome. We will continue to support efforts to fulfil our negotiating mandate and, above all, action to establish the long-awaited programme of work. Ladies and gentlemen, we each need to adopt a spirit of generosity in order to achieve this goal.

We recognize that the Conference's deliberations do not take place in a vacuum, particularly when it comes to nuclear disarmament, and we look ahead with hope, since, in the coming days, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will enter into force. Although we welcome proposals to combat the proliferation of nuclear weapons, it is our view that, for these initiatives to be successful, they should be accompanied by concrete steps towards the total elimination of such weapons. In this regard, we look forward to the creation of a positive and mutually constructive feedback loop involving the normative instruments that are related to this specific item on the Conference's agenda.

Lastly, Mr. President, we call on all our fellow members of the Conference, a central multilateral disarmament diplomacy and international security body, to help us demonstrate that we have the political will to create the trust that will allow us to forge ahead with our urgent, common disarmament work and that, together, we can preserve the relevance and credibility of the Conference. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Permanent Representative of Chile. We will try again with Brazil.

Mr. Dalcero (Brazil): Mr. President at the outset, let me congratulate you for assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to congratulate you for all the very dedicated work you have done even before the beginning of our sessions in order to achieve positive results from its very first day.

The six Conference on Disarmament presidencies of 2021 – the P6 of 2021 – have been working closely together since the second semester of 2020. We had 12 meetings at the expert level and two ambassadorial ones. During this initial effort, Brazil witnessed the constructive spirit, flexible approach and commitment to this body of the Belgian delegation. Therefore, with a solid foundation built on our previous experience, we are confident in your ability to conduct our work in the coming weeks. You have our full support Mr. President.

I also wish to thank Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, for her thoughtful remarks today. As the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, she has also been coping with the hurdles of moving forward meetings and negotiations in the current sanitary situation. Your assistance, Madam Director-General, and that of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs team in Geneva will be crucial for a successful negotiation outcome.

Mr. President, in the last few years we have become accustomed to hearing about the Conference's paralysis and its inability to deliver on its mandate as the single multilateral forum on disarmament. In 2020, we had the actual paralysis of meetings due to a global pandemic. The stillness in the Palais des Nations set in just after we had come very close to a breakthrough in the negotiations. Compulsory social distancing has hampered the activities of this Conference. It may also give us a certain mental detachment, a perspective, clearing the fog of the intense interactions of previous years. With a cloudless mind, we now have an opportunity to build upon valuable contributions of the past, look forward and engage in an effort of good faith.

The circulation to the membership of three draft documents before the Conference's first meeting – something perhaps unprecedented – is an expression of common ground among the six States that will hold the Conference presidency this year and a starting point. Through criticism and improvement, negotiations, we will be able to validate the importance of diplomatic techniques in overcoming substantive differences among ourselves.

Mr. President, on the 2021 disarmament agenda, we have both celebrations and challenges. First and foremost, Brazil celebrates the thirtieth anniversary of the Argentine-Brazilian Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials. The adoption of the Guadalajara Declaration, which created the Agency in 1991, predated our countries' accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and laid the groundwork for very close and transparent cooperation. The partnership developed between Brazil and Argentina has been at the core of Brazilian nuclear policy in recent decades. We also believe that the international community should become more acquainted with the Agency's institutional experience in implementing a pioneering and exemplary model of nuclear transparency and cooperation, which could be used as a source of inspiration for efforts to address nuclear tensions in other parts of the world.

At the broader multilateral level, in just three days, on 22 January, a new and potent landmark of international law will come into existence: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will enter into force. The negotiation of the Treaty was based on two key tenets: that any use or detonation of nuclear weapons would have intolerable humanitarian consequences and that the logic of nuclear deterrence is bound to fail either through accident or miscalculation; therefore, banning nuclear weapons is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons complements and is consistent with the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and it is the ultimate expression of all commitments in the architecture of nuclear disarmament. It also sets the highest legally binding multilateral requirements for non-proliferation compliance. In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will shortly become an additional pillar of the nuclear disarmament regime.

We also expect the international sanitary situation will allow us to finally convene the tenth NPT Review Conference later this year. The Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament. Still, the next Review Conference needs to be an opportunity for reaffirming and moving beyond previous commitments agreed upon by consensus, and our success should be measured by our response to that opportunity. At the current crossroads of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Brazil is confident that under the guidance of Ambassador Gustavo Zlauvinen, we will be able to achieve that goal jointly.

Mr. President, it is all the more essential that we use the diplomatic tools that we have in order to effectively build trust, find areas of consensus and establish a dialogue on how we can improve the international security environment. The Conference on Disarmament is actually fit to deliver multilateral negotiations on disarmament and other relevant international security issues. You have already thoroughly elaborated on the negotiation package, Mr. President, and my delegation has nothing to add at this point to your considerations. I thank you.

The President: I thank the representative of Brazil. Now, before moving to the next speaker on the list, let me first ask you for your kind cooperation in making your statements as short and succinct as possible in view of the limited time we have. As you know, our meetings are only two hours.

And second, I forgot to inform you when we started this session that requests for rights of reply, if any, will be taken at the end of the meeting. With that, I now move to Indonesia, on behalf of the Group of 21. The chargé d'affaires of Indonesia has the floor.

I am sorry, but we have a problem again with the sound. While the representative of Indonesia reconnects, I will give the floor to Portugal on behalf of the European Union. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Wagner (Portugal) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

We congratulate Belgium on assuming the first presidency of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you and the other members of the group of six States (the P6 States) that will hold the Conference presidency this year every success in your endeavours. We start a new year with all hope that these difficult circumstances will not prevent us from moving ahead. We commend your early and active preparations and well-coordinated engagement with all the incoming presidencies and Conference member States, thus bringing more consistency, continuity and predictability to our work.

We appreciate that you intend to build on the achievements of 2020 and, concretely, on the draft programme of work we were unable to adopt. We thank you for your early draft on a programme of work for the 2021 Conference session, which we can support. We look forward to this session and we will fully support the P6 States in their endeavours to agree to a programme of work as early as possible.

We also wish to thank the United Nations Secretary-General, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, the Secretary-General of the Conference and the Conference secretariat for their support for the Conference's work. Promoting effective multilateralism and rules-based global governance is the cornerstone of the European Union's common foreign and security policy.

The European Union will continue to do its utmost to protect the integrity of the rules-based international system, which is key to our collective security. The European Union has one central aim for this year's Conference session: to reinvigorate substantive work towards concrete negotiations, which have not been possible in this forum for much too long. The Conference remains the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiation body and its continued relevance is of utmost importance for the European Union. We are confident that despite the known challenges, we must advance technical, substantive work and broaden areas of agreement so that we are better prepared to start negotiations at an early date.

The concept of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work should not act as a barrier to beginning substantive work on core items on the Conference's agenda. As highlighted by the Netherlands in its working paper during the 2019 session, we cannot afford to have protracted procedural debates on the organization of work at the beginning of each session but should rather opt for a more pragmatic approach to scheduling our activities, similar to the approach taken in the more distant past. Strong political will, increased trust and flexibility are urgently required of all Conference members if we are to break the impasse and bring the Conference on Disarmament back on track and towards genuinely fulfilling the mandate and role it has been assigned by the international community.

While the European Union and its member States are ready to launch substantive work on all core items, we reiterate that our long-standing priority in the Conference on Disarmament is to immediately commence negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). And we support starting such negotiations in accordance with document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. We recall that substantial progress has already been made on the possible definitions, scope, verification and the legal and institutional arrangements for such a treaty, thanks to the efforts of the relevant Group of Governmental Experts and the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group.

We encourage the P6 States and all Conference members to devote attention to these issues in 2021. We should also build on the work done by the Conference's subsidiary body 2 in 2018, which is reflected in its consensus report, contained in the 2018 document CD/2139.

In the meantime, we call on all States possessing nuclear weapons that have not yet done so to declare and uphold an immediate moratorium on their production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We welcome the action by the two European nuclear-weapon States, which have declared relevant moratoriums and dismantled or converted facilities for the production of such material and call on others to follow suit.

Promoting universal adherence to and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a top priority for the European Union. All European Union member States have ratified the Treaty and are abiding by their obligations.

We urge all States that have not yet done so, in particular those listed in annex 2, to sign and ratify the Treaty without any preconditions or further delay. In the meantime, we call on all States to abide by a moratorium on nuclear weapon tests or any other nuclear explosions and to refrain from any action that would defeat the object and purpose of the Treaty.

The European Union continues to actively support the enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament, which currently has only 65 members. Since the last expansion, in 2002, 27 countries, including 12 European Union member States, have been waiting to become Conference members, and the number of observer States has grown each year, reaching a new long-term high in 2020. We would like to propose that a special coordinator be appointed to lead substantive consultations and lay out possible scenarios, for the consideration of Conference members, for the long-overdue expansion of membership.

Supporting and promoting gender equality and the full empowerment of women are at the heart of European policies internally and externally. The European Union supports the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. In 2020, the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) generated momentum for further efforts to effectively mainstream gender-relevant considerations in United Nations disarmament work and to ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes around issues related to peace and security. We should also engage youth and explore further opportunities to exchange views with civil society, academia, industry and research institutions within the Conference on Disarmament.

In 2021, the European Union will focus in particular on promoting a successful outcome for the postponed Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The European Union's support for that Treaty is unwavering. It is grounded in our conviction that a multilateral approach to security, including disarmament and non-proliferation, is the best way to maintain international peace and security. Hence, our commitment to upholding and strengthening the Treaty, promoting its universalization and enhancing the implementation of all obligations under the Treaty and the commitments undertaken during the previous review conferences.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty is a historic success and the cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, and its full implementation is crucial. The European Union strongly supports all three pillars of the Treaty and will continue to promote comprehensive balance and full implementation of the 2010 Review Conference action plan. We stress the need to implement all obligations and commitments under the Treaty, including the need for concrete progress towards the full implementation of article VI, with the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The European Union continues to contribute actively to the Treaty review process and provide support to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Treaty bureau for the organization of regional and thematic seminars, which should help to build common ground in the run-up to the Review Conference. Furthermore, the European Union continues to provide substantive funding to the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research on the process of confidence-building leading to the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems in the Middle East.

The European Union reaffirms its long-standing commitment to verifiable and effective treaty-based nuclear arms control and disarmament, bearing in mind the severe and increasingly volatile security environment. The European Union stresses the need to preserve and further advance general arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation processes.

The European Union will continue to encourage the United States and the Russian Federation to seek further reductions to their arsenals, including strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons and push further discussions on confidence-building, transparency, risk reduction, including strategic and nuclear risk reduction measures, verification activities and reporting.

Given the expiration in early February 2021, we strongly call for the extension of the New START, as well as negotiations of broader follow-up agreements. In this regard, the

European Union welcomes the increased transparency some nuclear-weapon States have shown with respect to their doctrines and nuclear weapons and calls on others to show similarly increased transparency.

We encourage China to actively contribute to this process. We reaffirm our original commitment to and continued support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as a key element of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture and endorsed unanimously by the Security Council through resolution 2231 (2015). We acknowledge the issues arising from the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the agreement and the reimposition of its sanctions. We welcome President-elect Biden's positive statements on the Plan of Action and look forward to working with the incoming United States Administration.

At the same time, we remain deeply concerned at Iran's actions inconsistent with the Plan of Action, in particular continued accumulation of low enriched uranium, deployment of advanced centrifuges, enrichment of uranium, up to 20 per cent, at the underground facility in Fordow and preparations for uranium material production. We strongly urge Iran to stop those actions and refrain from any further steps that are inconsistent with the Plan of Action commitments and return to full implementation without delay. Continued full and timely cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency remains critical.

The European Union will continue to address all proliferation crises in a resolute way. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's reaffirmation of its intention to retain and further develop its nuclear ballistic missile programmes, in violation of multiple Security Council resolutions, continues to undermine international work for building trust and establishing lasting peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, free of nuclear weapons. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to meaningful negotiations and, in the meantime, to stick to a moratorium on nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches, refrain from further provocations and take concrete and credible steps towards building trust and confidence and abandoning all of its nuclear weapon and ballistic missiles programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, as required by the Security Council.

The European Union stands ready to support future diplomatic initiatives. Until the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stops the development of its nuclear and missile programmes, the European Union will continue to work with countries around the world to ensure that the substantial United Nations sanctions in place are fully implemented and respected by all. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty without delay and to return to compliance with its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the European Union for its statement. We will now go back to the Group of 21. Indonesia, you have the floor.

Ms. Werdaningtyas (Indonesia): Thank you. On behalf of the Group of 21, we would like to congratulate you and your team.

The President: I am really sorry, Ambassador, but the sound is not good. The interpreters cannot work, so, in the meantime, we will have to move to the next speaker, the Special Presidential Envoy and acting Under Secretary for Arms Control of the United States of America, Mr. Marshall Billingslea.

Mr. Billingslea (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. Speaking on behalf of the United States, we offer our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for the first part of this year. We are fortunate to begin with Belgium in the Chair. I also give a special thanks to our Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Robert Wood, who has done important work as our representative.

It is a pleasure to be with you here today as we convene the next session of the Conference. This is an organization that has historically played such an important role in safeguarding peace and security in the past, and one which could do so again in the future, although I must say the behaviour of Turkey and Iran this morning calls that into doubt. I particularly urge Turkey to reconsider, as you will be known by the company you choose to keep.

Tomorrow, here in Washington, former Vice-President Joe Biden will be sworn in as the forty-sixth President of the United States. As the outgoing President's adviser and his Envoy and as acting Under Secretary, I – and the State Department team here – have worked very closely over the past month with the incoming United States Administration. At the end of the day, of course, as Americans, we all swear the same oath of allegiance to our Constitution, and we all labour faithfully to serve the same nation.

For those of you who are democracies with whom we have treaty alliances in both Europe and Asia, you can be reassured that there is an enduring and unwavering commitment to our collective security. For those of you like Iran, who are adversaries of democracy, who violate international accords, who subvert the rule of law and who undermine international norms, there will be no lessening of America's determination to hold you accountable, to expose your behaviours and to impose consequences. In these respects, America's foreign policy will hold the same course bearing and heading as it has since our founding.

Now, to the matter at hand. It is not a flaw that the security policy of nations, particularly the field of arms control, is often guided by lofty visions of idealists. That is laudable. The fatal flaw arises when idealism is married with naivety.

History records those who ignore the reality of how the world is and instead fantasize about the world as they wish it would be as being destined to failure, or worse, to incentivize aggression through appeasement. In this respect, things such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons are examples of highly counterproductive arrangements.

History records those who proceed from a recognition of what is and who work from positions rooted in reality as true statesmen who have strengthened global peace and stability through their words and their deeds. The sad reality that we face today is that we have a global arms control infrastructure that has been deeply corroded by the actions of countries such as Iran but also by nations such as the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China.

This is lamentable, but it is the truth. We cannot wish it away or ignore it. If we are to establish a new and better global arms control framework, we must begin with an understanding of how eroded have become certain fundamental principles, such as transparency, confidence-building, verification and compliance, and good faith. Even today, we have seen the principle of participation of sovereign nations – sovereign United Nations Members – now under attack as a principle in the Conference on Disarmament.

We also must understand that we have entered a new era of arms control. The approach of the cold war era, which relied upon multilateral solutions for some things but reserved for super-Powers bilateral arrangements to avoid nuclear weapons arms races, is over. Henceforth, only multilateral solutions will have the potential to be enduring.

They may be large multilateral agreements, such as those that can be fashioned at the Conference on Disarmament, or smaller trilateral accords, as should be the case for future nuclear arms limitations, but they will all be multilateral in some fashion. Over the years, the Russian Federation has become increasingly reliant on nuclear weapons. It has adopted a provocative nuclear doctrine that embraces early escalation and use of nuclear weapons.

It is vital, given this stance, that Russia reassure the international community that it continues to agree that the laws of armed conflict, particularly the concept of proportionality, apply with regard to nuclear weapons, and I urge our Russian colleagues in their intervention to state unequivocally that it continues to do so. The United States is concerned, in keeping with Russia's new doctrine, that it is building and modernizing an arsenal of thousands of nuclear warheads that are completely unconstrained by the New START. More than 60 or 70 per cent of Russia's nuclear arsenal sits outside any form of arms control limitation, and the size and variety of nuclear weapons being deployed in tactical and shorter-range systems is surging. Today, Russia has far more nuclear weapons or warheads meant for non-strategic systems, such as short- and medium-range missiles and torpedoes and landmines and so on, than it does for systems covered under the New START. Indeed, President Putin seems to have walked away from the presidential nuclear initiatives that were affirmed by his predecessors as well as past United States Presidents.

In light of this, and in light of Russia's destabilizing projects such as Poseidon and Skyfall, which do not fit within any deterrence framework, we have been unable to reaffirm the cold war era joint statement that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought". We agree with that principle, but no United States President, no leader of any nation, should play the game of reaffirming something with Vladimir Putin when we suspect he really does not believe it.

It seems, in fact, that Putin and his inner circle think perhaps nuclear war can be won, and Russia is constantly war-gaming and exploring how to fight one with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). All right-minded nations in the Conference on Disarmament today should encourage Russia to abandon the "flying Chernobyl" cruise missile called Skyfall and the undersea version called Poseidon and to stop adding hundreds upon hundreds of nuclear warheads to its arsenal every year.

I urge others to join us in calling on Russia to be truthful about the fact that it is engaged in nuclear weapons tests with yield at Novaya Zemlya, despite its pledge not to engage in such tests. The United States is not engaged in such testing, and we are not engaged in any nuclear weapons build-up, but Russia is. We urge Russia to stop.

Speaking of other nuclear weapons developed by Russia, nothing has done more harm to the global arms control architecture than Russia's brazen violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Russia destroyed the INF Treaty by cheating – cheating, we now know, for more than a decade. The Russians secretly produced, tested and have now deployed an intermediate-range nuclear-tipped cruise missile in direct contravention of that Treaty. The Russian military now fields multiple battalions of these SSC-8 missiles. The United States, on the other hand, does not field any similar systems. Unlike Russia, we honour our treaty obligations. Our approach to arms control is very straightforward. When we make a deal, we keep our end of the deal. We keep our commitments, and we expect other nations to do likewise. Russia failed to keep its commitments, and the INF Treaty fell casualty. Now, Vladimir Putin is attempting to solidify his exploitive advantage by calling for a moratorium on intermediate-range nuclear forces.

This is a bad-faith arms control gambit that America and our allies have rebuffed. We must remain clear-eyed and vigilant. No country should stumble into Vladimir Putin's moratorium trap.

Instead, there will be consequences for Russia's behaviour as we move to protect our friends and our allies in both Europe and Asia. We will field conventional intermediate-range capabilities in the next two to three years, which will give us a mobile and survivable response to hostile actions. When paired with other emerging capabilities and cooperative defence postures, these systems will bolster deterrence. We will work closely with allies on interoperability and exportability matters, and we are committed not to allow Russia to gain any advantage from its sabotage of the INF Treaty and that arms control architecture.

Sadly, Russia's violations of arms control agreements are not limited to the nuclear arena, but in the interests of time, I will summarize simply to say that we view it as unacceptable that Russia would use a fourth-generation nerve agent, the novichok nerve agent, in the attempted assassinations of Skripal and the opposition leader Navalny. Russia is clearly maintaining an undeclared offensive chemical warfare programme in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and we have significant concerns about Russian activities that are precluded by the Biological Weapons Convention as well.

We all know that Russia has systematically dismantled conventional arms control in Europe. It abandoned the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. It is not implementing the Vienna Document requirements and it is preventing modernization of that accord. Russia's continued occupation of Crimea and parts of Georgia and Moldova and its unconventional warfare operations in Ukraine are all blatant violations of the Charter of the United Nations as well as the Helsinki Final Act. Russia is also engaged in multiple violations of the Open Skies Treaty and abused that Treaty for purposes for which it was not meant, particularly to gather intelligence on critical infrastructure in the United States and on our allies in Europe.

This is regrettable, and this left the United States, again, with no option but to withdraw, given that the Treaty had no enforcement mechanisms. Now, I observe Russia is attempting to blackmail NATO nations with its withdrawal after having defeated the basic object and purpose of this Treaty through its own actions. These actions are not transparent – they do not build confidence. They are violations of international law.

Given this, no conversation of arms control with regard to Russia can be complete without verification discussions. I know many of you are familiar with that old phrase “trust but verify”.

An agreement with Russia, with any country, that cannot be verified is not worth the paper upon which it is printed. Further arms control agreements must be complete, effective and verifiable.

Now, despite all of the headwinds we face in working with Russia – and they are significant – we have nonetheless made important progress on this front, and the momentum should not be allowed to fade. Notwithstanding all of the behaviours I have catalogued, we have indicated a willingness to extend the New START, provided that Russia stop its arms racing.

Several weeks ago, in exchange for an extension of New START, President Trump offered President Putin an opportunity, an historic opportunity, to place a cap on both countries’ nuclear stockpiles, covering all nuclear warheads. This is something both of their predecessors were never able or willing to do. This was a bold and an unprecedented proposal, and we were pleased to reach agreement at the highest levels of our respective Governments. Of course, to finalize this agreement we will need to define a few things. Specifically, exactly what we are freezing and the respective levels at which we will freeze. Unfortunately, Russia has declined our offer to meet on four occasions to finalize these details.

This is regrettable, as we were and in fact still are, if pressure is kept on, on the brink of an historic agreement. Covering all nuclear warheads is a crucial part of a complete agreement. President Putin has now publicly agreed to cap total warhead levels, and we urge Russia not to backtrack. This is now the minimum threshold by which future nuclear arms control agreements with Russia and subsequently with China will be judged.

This is one area where we believe the time is ripe for concluding a new arms control framework – again, first with Russia and then with China. I cannot say the same with regard to detailed discussion of space. The time may come for that, but we must not put the cart before the horse. We must first develop clear norms and expectations for behaviour in outer space.

I would offer in particular that the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space is deeply flawed. It is clearly drafted with ulterior motives, as its main proponents are actively developing and deploying weapons that are designed to attack satellites in space. Some of these capabilities would be covered by the draft Treaty, but there are significant exceptions. We will discuss those further as these discussions evolve, but we feel that it is essential first and foremost before launching into arms control negotiations on outer space to define what norms of behaviour can be developed to reduce risk of miscalculation, particularly as the risk continues to grow with reckless behaviour by both Russia and China.

Returning to Earth, as I mentioned at the beginning, many remained trapped in a cold war era binary mindset when it comes to nuclear arms control. The reality, unfortunately, is that China is engaged in the single greatest expansion of a nuclear arsenal since the advent of the cold war, and it is doing it behind a great wall of secrecy.

The same country that is running concentration camps for Uighurs, crushing peaceful protests in Hong Kong, has attacked Indian troops on the Indian side of the border, fabricated maritime boundaries by building islands in the South China Sea and that wants to invade and destroy Taiwanese democracy is now engaged in a crash nuclear build-up. China does not want you to know the truth. There is an old saying: “Hide a dagger behind a smile.”

China would have nations believe that the size of its deterrent is really nothing different from that of the United Kingdom or France, and you probably will hear some of that

today or in the future during the intervention of the People's Republic of China. In reality, the situation is far different, and to expose this deception, the United States has declassified a wide range of intelligence on China's clandestine build-up, including images from China's 2019 military parade. In that parade, the People's Liberation Army's display of missiles stretched more than two and a half miles, nearly 10 times longer than it did a decade ago.

Over that same time period, China's missile production capacity has grown by 180 per cent. China is building an impressive array of missile systems, including many types of road- and rail-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles, silo-based launch-on-warning intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and 18 different types and variants of INF nuclear-capable-type missiles, both ballistic and cruise. In fact, China has deployed more than 1,200 such missiles so far, and of course China does not plan to let these weapons collect dust. In 2019, China launched at least 225 ballistic missiles more than the rest of the world combined.

And the same was true in 2018. Even this year, with COVID-19 sucking the energy, the resources, the time and the attention of nations worldwide to fight a virus that China let spread, the Chinese broke their own record, launching 250 missiles in this past year. We are witnessing a dramatic shift in China's nuclear posture.

In 2015, the Chinese claimed to be interested only in maintaining a lean and effective nuclear force. Just four years later, that phrase was retired and the intention with it.

While China continues to tout its so-called no-first-use policy, it is clear the policy is propaganda, not policy. Not only is it riddled with caveats, but the systems China is building and deploying prove that it is not genuine. An example is China's claim that it would not threaten non-nuclear-weapon States with nuclear weapons. Why, then, has China deployed the Dong-Feng 21A (DF-21A) at Chizhou, from which it can only hit non-nuclear-weapon States other than China's treaty partner North Korea?

For more than a year, we have been calling on China to negotiate in good faith in order to prevent a dangerous and unprecedented three-way nuclear arms race. As all nations of the Conference on Disarmament know, China is legally obligated to do so.

It is deeply regrettable that China has chosen not to honour this legal obligation. The United States is now concerned regarding China's compliance with its article VI obligations. In the days to come, it is imperative that China be reminded of this obligation. It is essential that all peaceloving nations continue to urge the Chinese to the table. Many have done so already. However, a handful of nations that historically have been vocal on the importance of nuclear arms control have, to date, remained silent. We are at a critical juncture, and now is the time for the idealists to join with the realists to avoid the perils of a three-way nuclear arms race unlike anything experienced during the cold war.

Now is not the time for naivety. It is time to multilateralize nuclear arms control. It is time for Russia to finalize with the incoming Biden Administration the details of the Trump-Putin agreement. And I ask all nations to urge Russia to step forward and complete what we have begun and to remind China that it must negotiate in good faith, both with us and with the Russians, on effective nuclear arms control mechanisms. And we should hold the Chinese to it. I have highlighted today the dangers this body and others like it will be called upon to confront in the days to come.

We have exposed some of the corrosive behaviour that has damaged the international arms control framework. There can be no equivocation or timidity in addressing these threats to global peace and security. Frank conversations like these are important. The first step in resolving any problem is to identify the problem, to expose the lie, to name the danger. This is necessary. And nations and individuals that have the courage and moral fortitude to do so deserve our respect and praise. But this is not sufficient. When countries or individuals behave recklessly or dishonestly, they must suffer the consequences. If they do not, faith in and respect for bodies like this one is eroded.

Not only do bad actors lose what little respect they had for the institution, but even those who supported and respected the institution begin to waver. Now is not the time to waver. The stakes are too high. The United States looks forward to meeting these challenges

together with our friends and allies and working through the Conference on Disarmament for the betterment of all mankind. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the acting Under Secretary for Arms Control of the United States of America and now give the floor again to Indonesia for another attempt. As it seems we do not have Indonesia, let us move on. I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Peru.

Ms. Alfaro Espinosa (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much. I wish to begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We have confidence in your ability to take on the sensitive responsibility that comes with being the first President of the 2021 session. You can count on the support and commitment of the delegation of Peru. We wish everyone present at this virtual meeting a healthy and productive year.

We welcome the new permanent representatives to the Conference and wish them well in the performance of their duties. Peru reaffirms its commitment to strengthening multilateral processes and institutions. In that regard, we favour the participation of all States Members of the United Nations and all States with observer status in the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, we are experiencing an unprecedented health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; the world was not prepared to face this crisis, and as a result we are now in a time of uncertainty and clear human vulnerability. The nature and scope of the crisis has shown that it cannot be addressed by countries acting separately; moreover, the crisis has made it clear that there are other threats to humanity that also require our attention – namely, climate change and the possibility of nuclear war. As a result of the pandemic, we are witnessing a moment in human history, a decisive moment, that requires political will – the political will to strengthen multilateralism with a view to preventing or responding to global problems and challenges that must be addressed urgently to ensure the survival of the planet, the welfare of humanity and collective security, all of which are purposes foreseen in the Charter of the United Nations.

Our Governments are already working hard to increase global capacity to prevent and respond to infectious viral diseases and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The question is how the Conference can contribute to these multilateral efforts.

For years, the Conference played a crucial role in building a better world. The important instruments it delivered now form part of the international security architecture and enjoy multilateral legitimacy. However, it has been at a standstill for two decades, in a context that is a cause for concern. Geopolitical tensions are prompting renewed interest in weapons of mass destruction and, as a result, we are facing the revival of programmes for the modernization of nuclear arsenals and security doctrines that prioritize nuclear deterrence. The figures and information that we have just heard from the delegate of the United States are particularly troubling. Peru considers that, in 2021, the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work for the Conference would be the most concrete expression of States' political will to resume the Conference's substantive work.

We thank Belgium for the documents that were circulated, on behalf of the six Presidents of this session, in December 2020. We see the proposed package as a strong commitment to returning to the moment in 2020 when we were close to adopting a programme of work. My delegation will participate in the discussions in a constructive spirit, confident that all delegations present can be counted on to demonstrate the flexibility that will be needed if we are to complete our task.

In the current fragile international security context, in which the shadow of uncertainty has been cast over the future of bilateral treaties that for years have limited, reduced and eliminated nuclear weapons, the revitalization of the work of the Conference would send a clear message that States are committed to making progress in negotiating international instruments in the areas of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Peru reiterates its deep concern about the threat posed to humanity by the existence of nuclear weapons. We believe that their use or the threat of their use constitutes a crime against humanity and a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law. That

is why we are encouraged by the growing number of States to have ratified or acceded to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, whose entry into force could not be timelier. We are making the final arrangements at the national level to ratify the Treaty in the near future.

Starting on 22 January 2021, a day that will mark a milestone, the possession of nuclear weapons will be prohibited in the interests of international peace and security and in complementarity with existing international nuclear weapons treaties, in particular the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and other agreements establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones. We see this instrument as the product of efforts by the international community – including States, international agencies and civil society – to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and as the only effective safeguard for their total prohibition and elimination in a transparent, verifiable and irreversible manner.

I would like to conclude by highlighting the commitment of the International Gender Champions to gender mainstreaming in disarmament affairs. The recently published annual bulletin of the Disarmament Impact Group is a testament to the significant efforts being made to promote gender equality, inclusiveness and diversity within the multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control architecture. We commend the leadership being shown on this issue by the Ambassadors of Canada, the Philippines, Ireland and Namibia and by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. The Peruvian delegation remains willing to continue considering gender initiatives in the Conference in 2021, including last year's proposals, made by the presidencies of Argentina and Australia, respectively, to strengthen the participation of women in our work and to make technical adjustments to the Conference's rules of procedure to ensure that they are written in gender-neutral language. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Permanent Representative of Peru. We will make one last attempt with Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 21. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Ms. Werdaningtyas (Indonesia): I do not want to prolong the technical problem, but, of course, on behalf of the Group of 21, we would like to express our disappointment with the system. Maybe this will have to be something to reconsider at our next meeting. Of course, if I cannot deliver the statement now, I will circulate the statement in writing to all members of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: Ambassador, I am awfully sorry. I suggest we hear you at our next plenary meeting. You will be the first speaker on Thursday morning. In the meantime, please make sure you have the right equipment, including a headset. Let us move to the next speaker, the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Mr. President, allow me to start by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency and commending you and the other members of the group of the year's six Presidents for the energetic start of the 2021 session. By circulating the package well ahead of the start of the session, you have given us all the opportunity to start this session with a clear sense of purpose. You and the other members of the group of the six Presidents can count on the full support of the delegation of the Netherlands. I also wish to extend a warm welcome to the new colleagues who have recently arrived. The delegation of the Netherlands looks forward to fruitful collaboration with them.

At the outset, I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament on her statements. The Netherlands shares her sense of urgency. In addition to the statement delivered by Portugal on behalf of the European Union, I would like to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

Mr. President, the 2020 session of the Conference was remarkable in many aspects. Despite the lack of substantive progress, due to the pandemic, as well as political circumstances, there were still some positives on which we should build during this year's session. It is therefore encouraging that this year the group of six Presidents intends to operate as a team, providing much-needed guidance and continuity to the Conference.

While we start the 2021 session in a virtual format, we can also see the light at the end of the tunnel. Hopefully, we can return to in-person meetings at the start of the summer. Until that time, we should make the best of the time and resources available to us. In this context,

I would like to stress that the Netherlands remains of the view that it is up to the member States to decide how scarce resources, including for the use of online platforms, are allocated.

In recent months, we have seen a number of disarmament forums have successful meetings in an online format, including the negotiations of the resolutions of the General Assembly's First Committee, demonstrating that work on substance is possible in an online format, as long as we are willing to make progress.

Turning to the package on the table, my delegation welcomes the focus on the substance of the agenda. My delegation has long argued, including in its "back-to-basics" working paper of 2019, that in order to make progress the Conference should focus on the substance of its agenda. The package before us will allow the Conference to do so in a structured manner.

For the Netherlands, the commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices remains a key priority. In a similar vein, developments in outer space are increasingly cause for concern. The Netherlands is keen to focus on reducing the vulnerability of space and wants to contribute to strengthening the international legal order and security and stability in this area. Moreover, we live in a world where new and disruptive technologies continue to emerge. These developments can have disturbing ramifications for our international security environment. We hope that the Conference can make progress on these topics by agreeing on the packages proposed by the group of the six Presidents. You can count on the support of the Netherlands.

Similarly, the Netherlands has long supported a dialogue on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. The appointment of a facilitator to hold informal, open-ended consultations is an important, much-needed first step after a stalemate of two decades.

The Netherlands is optimistic that the year 2021 is the year in which the disarmament community can get to work on a number of important issues. High on the agenda is, of course, the postponed tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We need strong and continued commitment to the strengthening and implementation of the Treaty. It remains our collective responsibility to use the Review Conference to take stock of where we are, to reflect upon what we have accomplished and to set new goals in order to address the current challenges to our multilateral and security environment.

In the context of the Treaty, nuclear disarmament verification, risk reduction, crisis stability and crisis management are major points of attention for the Netherlands. We will keep advocating for measures aimed at nuclear risk reduction, such as communication channels, transparency, dialogue about doctrines and increasing decision time in crisis situations. Concrete measures on these issues can provide a basis for tangible steps in the context of the tenth Review Conference and beyond.

But there are also other important disarmament conferences on our agenda this year, such as the review conferences of the parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The Netherlands, as President of the Nineteenth Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Landmines Convention, will use its presidency to strengthen this important humanitarian instrument by focusing on innovation, capacity-building and inclusivity.

Projecting these themes on the Conference on Disarmament, we see that there is room for innovation in the work of the Conference, a need to build the necessary capacity for future disarmament measures and inclusivity to make collective progress. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands Dear colleagues, we have three requests for the right of reply, so, in view of the time, I suggest we now suspend the general debate. We will hear the three replies and, of course, resume the general debate and continue with the list of speakers at our next plenary meeting, on Thursday.

Before hearing these three replies, I would ask the delegations concerned to be extremely short and concise.

I first give the floor to the Permanent Representative of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*):¹ Mr. President, the Chinese delegation and I personally would like to offer our congratulations as you assume the first rotating presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for 2021, and we warmly welcome the seven new colleagues who have taken up their posts. We are also very pleased to take part in the work of this year's group of the six Presidents of the session, together with the last President of the preceding session and the first of the next session. China believes that all United Nations Member States have an equal right to take part in multilateral arms control work. We hope this year to see more States participating in the work of the Conference as observers and we believe the President should hold active consultations with the relevant parties in this regard.

Mr. President, in exercise of my right of reply, I would like to strongly oppose and resolutely reject the malicious attack levelled just now against China by the United States of America. In the past two years, China has repeatedly had to counter such attacks in many international forums, including the Conference, and has set out in detail our country's relevant policy positions. I would like to emphasize that the current United States Administration has spread lies and gone to extremes with its misdeeds in the field of arms control. Its absurd arguments cannot hide the fact that China has an open and straightforward nuclear policy and an open and straightforward policy of defence and arms control. The international community has had enough of this game where the wrongdoer accuses others of wrongdoing. Starting tomorrow, the Conference should never have to hear such nonsense again. I think this is the common view of the majority of the member States. I ask the secretariat to ensure that my words are put on record.

Mr. President, I had prepared a formal statement for today's plenary meeting, but for lack of time, I will not read it out here today. I will upload my formal statement to share it with all member States, and I ask the secretariat to include it in the record of today's meeting. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China to the Conference on Disarmament. I now give the floor to the delegate of the Russian Federation.

As we cannot hear the delegate of the Russian Federation, we will move to the delegate of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Ms. Hroneska (North Macedonia): Mr. President, firstly, let me congratulate you on the assumption of your role as President and wish you –

The President: I am very sorry, but we also have a problem with your sound, so let us try with the Russian Federation again.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to exercise the right of reply to respond to the statement by the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security of the United States of America.

We have now for some time heard similar inflammatory speeches by officials of the Administration of Donald Trump, at various forums and in different formats, and on numerous occasions. Today's intervention by the Under Secretary of State merely confirmed yet again that for the past four years the outgoing Administration has engaged in the basest form of propaganda, manipulation of public opinion and outright lies.

Obviously, all these techniques, which have nothing to do with diplomatic practice, served specific purposes. Among these, several can be singled out.

First among these is to justify its refusal of the constructive and mutually beneficial dialogue that is so necessary to address concerns about arms control and disarmament.

Second is to justify the destructive steps the country has taken since 2000 to dismantle the existing system of international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation agreements.

¹ The full text of this statement has been issued as document CD/2211.

The third is to justify the implementation of American plans in the field of nuclear-missile weaponry and the deployment of weapon systems in outer space.

The fourth is to impose on the international community the American vision of the strategic situation in the world, which obviously has nothing to do with reality.

Fifth is to intimidate both the country's allies and the rest of the world by referring to some kind of Russian threat so that the conditions are ripe for the success of its own military-industrial complex, which needs to expand the consumer base for its products of death.

And this was a statement made by the representative of a country that was the only one to ever use a nuclear weapon, that has a military budget equal to that of the rest of the countries of the world combined and that for decades now has undermined international security and one of the pillars thereof – namely, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. It is also the State that would rather lecture than engage in constructive, balanced, mutually beneficial dialogue aimed at ensuring the security of all States, without exception, taking into account their national interests.

The statement showed, unfortunately, that the main obstacle to positive change in arms control has been the mindset that has taken hold among the representatives of the outgoing Administration.

We remain optimistic and hope that the new Administration will reconsider this approach and abandon this mindset, which has proved toxic to the entire rest of the world.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation. We have no other choice but to have the representative of North Macedonia as the first speaker at the next plenary meeting.

In the meantime, we have received another request, from the Islamic Republic of Iran, to exercise a right of reply. But it will be at the next plenary meeting, because we are already over time now. I suggest, then, that we take North Macedonia and then the Islamic Republic of Iran as the first speakers on Thursday morning. And thank you very much for your understanding of a very frustrating situation. I apologize. And I hope that, in close cooperation with the secretariat, each and every delegation will be able to solve all today's technical problems so that we are all able to speak and work properly. Again, I am sorry, but we now have to adjourn. As I said, we will meet again on Thursday morning.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.