

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Thursday, 21 January 2021, at 3 p.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium)



The President: Good afternoon, dear colleagues. I call to order the 1551st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

We will continue with the general debate, so the next speaker on the list is the Ambassador of Japan. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Thank you very much. Mr. President, first of all, let me reiterate my congratulations to you on your assumption of the first presidency of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Please be assured of our full support and cooperation. I would also like to extend my heartfelt welcome to colleagues new to the Conference. In addition, I thank the secretariat for enabling us to carry out our activities despite all the constraints and difficulties due to COVID-19.

Last year, Japan appreciated the close coordination shown by 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, which contributed greatly to enhancing the consistency and continuity of the Conference's work. It is very encouraging that, this year again, the current group of Presidents is engaged in such coordination.

Given the increasingly harsh and complex security environment, there is a pressing need for the Conference to fulfil its mandate as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. Japan is ready to show its flexibility and support in favour of any initiatives that may facilitate substantive work and pave the way to multilateral disarmament negotiations. In this vein, Japan supports the draft package proposed by the Belgian presidency. Japan calls upon all member States to show flexibility and political will so that the Conference can adopt a basis for its substantive work as soon as possible.

As for the issue of observers at the Conference, I believe that the wider observership of United Nations Member States at the Conference does much to make the Conference's work more relevant to the international community. Our future achievements will certainly be of a universal nature, as was the case in the past.

Mr. President, building upon the previous work of the Conference, we need to prioritize substantive activities on agenda items according to their degree of maturity. From this perspective, Japan reiterates the importance of the immediate commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Japan calls upon all nuclear-weapon States and States possessing nuclear weapons to declare or maintain a moratorium on the production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices until such a treaty takes effect. Japan is also ready and willing to contribute to the substantial work on any other substantive issues in the Conference on Disarmament.

Japan will continue to promote the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and will spare no efforts to this end. In this regard, Japan calls upon non-signatory States, including the remaining annex 2 States, to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay.

The way in which the Conference on Disarmament's work unfolds will inevitably have repercussions on the work of the upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in August. For the success of the Review Conference, Japan submitted last year a draft resolution entitled "Joint courses of action and future-oriented dialogue towards a world without nuclear weapons" to the General Assembly that was adopted with the support of 150 countries. This resolution was based upon a realistic and incremental approach to our common goal of a world without nuclear weapons. It tried to present common ground with a view to contributing to the success of the Review Conference.

Japan will spare no efforts to achieve our common goals of a successful Review Conference with a meaningful outcome. At the same time, realizing a world without nuclear weapons requires the nuclear-weapon States to take concrete measures. We welcome the joint efforts that the five nuclear-weapon States designated as such under the Treaty have made with a view to the success of the next NPT Review Conference.

Japan recognizes the importance of the treaty known as the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and also recognizes the ongoing dialogue among the parties

on the potential extension of that Treaty in a way that contributes to strategic stability. Japan also stresses specifically the importance of more transparency among nuclear-weapon States and reaffirms their special responsibility to initiate arms control dialogues in good faith on effective measures to prevent nuclear arms racing and help pave the way for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

Japan has promoted the activities of the Group of Eminent Persons for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament. This Group issued a Chair's report in October 2019 that was widely shared with members of the Conference on Disarmament. Building on the outcome of the work of this Group, Japan organized a track 1.5 meeting in March 2020. Japan is also actively engaged in and committed to the joint efforts and the discussions of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, the Stockholm Initiative and the working group Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament.

Mr. President, Japan stresses that this year the Conference should play the role assigned to it by the General Assembly resolution entitled "Reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours", which was adopted in 2020.

Japan is deeply concerned about North Korea's continued development of nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Japan reaffirms its strong commitment to the goal of achieving complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of all of North Korea's nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programmes and related facilities, as well as ballistic missiles of all ranges, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions. Japan calls on North Korea to take concrete steps towards denuclearization. Japan also calls on all Member States to fully implement relevant Security Council resolutions in this regard.

I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan. I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Eilon Shahar (Israel): Thank you very much, Mr. President.

At the outset, please allow me to thank you for your kind words of welcome. And as this is the first time I take the floor under your presidency, please allow me to congratulate you and express our sincere confidence in your able leadership and ability to make this first part of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament a success. Let me assure you, Mr. President, of my delegation's full cooperation and support throughout your presidency.

Mr. President and dear colleagues, 2020 has been a year full of unexpected and unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 crisis that affected the entire world, including the multilateral world and our work here in the Conference. I would like to congratulate the six Presidents of the 2020 session for their constructive cooperation, efforts, flexibility and commitment, which allowed meetings to take place even during the height of the global pandemic.

While science has already produced a vaccine, the world is still racing to vaccinate, and multilateralism continues to be challenged by health restrictions. We look forward to cooperating with the incoming group of six Presidents in order to conduct our important work with patience and caution.

Israel values the Conference and its function as the single multilateral negotiating forum for non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. The Conference remains a singular forum which includes all the States that should participate in such negotiations. In our view, that is what will ensure that the outcome will be meaningful and firmly based in reality.

One should seriously consider the implications and disadvantages stemming from the creation of independent processes outside the established disarmament architecture. These new disarmament measures might fail to give due regard to the security and stability contexts and might not engage all relevant participants. In addition, a non-inclusive process might forge agreements more quickly, yet it runs the risk of diminished outcomes and a more divisive disarmament world.

Now is the time to reflect on the mechanisms we have previously established and verify that countries are fulfilling their obligations and complying with relevant mechanisms. We should also take time to deepen our understanding of new technologies and the way they might affect our work. The Conference was created with the view that member States have different individual security interests that should not be cast aside.

Unfortunately, we continue to witness worrisome escalation in the realm of arms control and non-proliferation. In this regard, the Middle East is still struggling with chronic lack of compliance with arms control norms and principles.

This culture of non-compliance and disregard for international obligations and norms is, regrettably, very common and dangerous in our region. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in itself does not provide a remedy for the unique security challenges of the region, let alone the repeated violation of the Treaty by some of its members.

Four out of five cases of serious violations of the Treaty that have taken place since its entry into force have taken place in the Middle East. Surface-to-surface missiles and rockets, the related technologies, know-how and production processes have proliferated and been transferred to terrorist organizations in complete disregard of Security Council resolutions, the serenity of the States involved and the stability of the region as a whole.

Over the years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has violated its nuclear obligations, as reported on numerous occasions by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran's clandestine, undeclared nuclear activities remain a serious cause for concern. Its violations with regard to enrichment, stockpiling and research and development are now so extensive that they have rendered Iran's obligations completely meaningless. In addition, Iranian arms, some of which are of strategic importance, are used by terrorists and armed militias and threaten all Middle East countries, including my own.

Iran also attempts to destabilize the region by using every possible tool at its disposal, including terrorism and the use of missiles and rocket attacks against its neighbours. It makes these attempts from the territory of other countries in the region – namely, Syria and Iraq. Iran's support for terrorist organizations includes supplying weapons, financial and political support, as well as military training, in breach of numerous Security Council resolutions.

There is an urgent need to focus on the compliance with and implementation and verification of the obligations of States. The international community cannot react with indifference when States foster a culture of non-compliance. There is no place for double standards.

The use of chemical weapons by States in the Middle East against their own populations and neighbouring countries has occurred five times since the Second World War. These events were a clear violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which set the norm prohibiting the use of chemical and biological weapons, a protocol Israel has signed and ratified. Furthermore, two additional cases of member States from the Middle East violating the Chemical Weapons Convention are still in question and need to be further investigated.

In April 2020, we witnessed the first report issued by the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The report attributes responsibility for three different chemical attacks on civilians, in the spring of 2017, to the Syrian Government. The report calls on the Syrian Government to cooperate with the Organisation and the international community with a view to rectifying the gaps and discrepancies in its declaration on chemical weapons, to take full responsibility for its actions in violating its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and to destroy its chemical weapons arsenal. It is vital that the international community remain vigilant in dealing with the challenges of serious non-compliance in order to prevent further violations in the future.

In conclusion, Mr. President, we encourage countries to refrain from unjustified actions that are based on false comparisons and discourage any attempt to politicize our discussions here at the Conference on Disarmament. Israel hopes that members of the Conference will be able to bridge their differences and find a productive way forward. My delegation will continue to contribute constructively and assess with an open mind any suggestions that are presented.

The Conference has served the international community well in the past and we are confident that it also has much to contribute in the future. We must work together and try to find an appropriate balance between the desirable and the possible. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Israel and now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Villegas (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, allow me to wish you every success as President of this forum and to express my deep wish that in the coming weeks you will be able to steer us towards what must be our priority goal: the early adoption and implementation of a programme of work that will allow us to begin substantive work during the 2021 session.

My delegation recognizes the importance of coordination between the six presidencies of the Conference on Disarmament. That is why I would like to take this opportunity to also express the hope that the work of Bulgaria, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada and Chile, the other countries that will hold the presidency of the Conference this year, will bear fruit.

My delegation chaired the Conference in February 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic imposed limits on in-person meetings. At that time, despite extensive consultations by the Algerian and Argentine presidencies, it was not possible to adopt a programme of work. This, coupled with the severe impact of the pandemic on the work of the Conference – resulting in a reduction in the number of plenary meetings and a change in their format – meant that, despite the valuable efforts of successive presidencies, the Conference had to submit a report of a technical nature to the First Committee of the General Assembly for the third consecutive year.

Mr. President, the stalemate in the Conference inevitably undermines its credibility and jeopardizes its continuity. The challenge facing this forum is to demonstrate its relevance by implementing a programme of work and to once again become the disarmament negotiating forum of the international community in accordance with the mandate conferred upon it by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

In recent years, there have been important discussions on the Conference's agenda items, including outside this forum. All member States, for example, have participated in initiatives such as the establishment of groups of governmental experts to discuss issues including a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. Thus, some progress has been made in identifying technical and political elements, facilitating a better understanding of differences and improving the basis for consensus-building in preparation for future negotiations.

My delegation hopes that 2021 will find the members of this forum with renewed spirit and with the flexibility needed to adopt a programme that will enable the Conference to resume substantive work – something it has not been able to do in recent years.

In this regard, my delegation welcomes the draft programme of work – which provides for the establishment of five subsidiary bodies on seven agenda items – and stands ready to assist the presidencies and to engage in discussions with a view to the adoption of the draft. The last time that the Conference on Disarmament had subsidiary bodies was in 2018, and they undoubtedly served to revive substantive discussions.

Mr. President, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are priorities for Argentina, which has made significant efforts in this area, reflecting a clear and sustained commitment in the context of a vigorous peaceful nuclear programme. Strict respect for and compliance with the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is a guarantee of sustainable progress based on the three pillars of the Treaty.

For Argentina, the Treaty remains the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The forthcoming Review Conference, which will be chaired by Argentina, will serve to strengthen and renew our commitment to the Treaty, which continues to be valid after more than fifty years. It will also afford an opportunity to find common ground on key issues and to take practical steps towards the fulfilment of our disarmament and non-proliferation obligations.

Argentina is part of a region that historically has been at the forefront of disarmament and non-proliferation. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Brazilian–Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials, an agency whose aims are to apply safeguards and to build mutual trust and the trust of the international community in the exclusively peaceful nature of our respective nuclear plans.

The President: Ambassador, I am sorry, but the connection was apparently interrupted, so I suggest we move to the next speaker in the meantime. We will try to solve the issue and will then go back to you and enable you to finish your statement. Thank you very much.

I give the floor to the next speaker, the representative of Ethiopia.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): As this is my first time taking the floor, I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the first presidency of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to assure you that you can count on my delegation's support. My delegation also wishes to associate itself with the statement delivered by the Ambassador of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 21.

As we all know, 2020 was a challenging year. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only devastated our social fabric and the global economy but has also exposed the fragility of the international system, including the Conference on Disarmament. Last year, we were unable to continue the plenary meetings in their usual format for much of the course of the year. Since its effects are still around, we may need to find a new mechanism to keep our Conference on track while preserving the core values of the Conference, as clearly stated in the Conference's rules of procedure.

My delegation takes pride in the work of the Conference, which has produced a number of key multilateral disarmament agreements that have contributed immensely to the continued preservation of world peace and security. I look forward to working closely with all the member States in an effort to make the Conference resume its role as the single multilateral negotiating forum for the advancement of nuclear disarmament and the elimination of other weapons of mass destruction.

Having said this, though, it is indeed disappointing that despite the efforts made thus far, more than two decades have elapsed without the Conference on Disarmament's reaching consensus on a programme of work. We believe we need to work hard and hope that members will demonstrate the necessary political will to ensure the commencement of the Conference's substantive work.

Mr. President, Ethiopia remains committed to global efforts to prevent the proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction and has signed all core multilateral and regional disarmament treaties and conventions, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Treaty of Pelindaba. As a non-nuclear-weapon State and a responsible member of the global community, we will continue to participate constructively in negotiations on disarmament issues.

Disarmament is clearly critical to global efforts to preserve world peace and security and make the world safe from the threat of or use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. This can be achieved only through effective and meaningful mechanisms that would prohibit the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons.

The Conference on Disarmament finds itself at a very critical stage, and these increasing threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are deeply concerning. The risk that they may end up in the wrong hands clearly endangers international peace and security.

Ethiopia firmly believes that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime. In our view, the three pillars of the Treaty – nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy – represent an unparalleled framework for maintaining and strengthening international peace and security. The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones is also critical to ensuring regional security that could contribute to the collective efforts of the international community

to achieve long-lasting world peace and stability. We support the strengthening of the existing nuclear-weapon-free zones and encourage efforts to establish new ones.

We also support strengthening international efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons and, in this context, a comprehensive fissile material cut-off treaty, a treaty on negative security assurances that would protect non-nuclear-weapon States against any threat and the prevention of arms race in outer space, all of which are noble goals.

It is indeed regrettable that international non-proliferation efforts have not yet succeeded in preventing nuclear proliferation. There is no doubt that for global efforts to succeed, it is indispensable to have a universal and comprehensive mechanism linked to the goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. In this regard, Ethiopia believes that the tenth NPT Review Conference should remain the main priority of disarmament discourse and that it should be convened as soon as the epidemiological situation allows.

Mr. President, let me conclude by reaffirming Ethiopia's commitment to and support for the success of the work of the Conference and assure you that my delegation will continue to engage constructively with all member States to achieve sustainable global peace and security through the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear arsenals. I thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Ethiopia. We will now go back to Argentina to enable you to finish your statement. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Villegas (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. As I was saying, my country belongs to a region that historically has been at the forefront of disarmament and non-proliferation. This year marks thirty years since the establishment of the Brazilian–Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials, an institution whose aims are to apply safeguards and to build mutual trust and the trust of the international community in the exclusively peaceful nature of the nuclear plans of Argentina and Brazil. The Agency demonstrates that there are valid alternatives for other regions where mistrust still exists.

The Conference on Disarmament brings the nuclear-weapon States together in a permanent negotiating forum on nuclear disarmament. Argentina, which depends on the leadership and commitment of the Conference, calls for the renewal of its efforts to make progress on unilateral, bilateral and, of course, multilateral disarmament measures.

In the sphere of conventional weapons, Argentina attaches great importance to the Arms Trade Treaty, in which regard it maintains an active role, having co-authored the resolution entitled “Towards an arms trade treaty” and presided in 2020 over the Sixth Conference of States Parties to the Treaty.

Argentina has promoted and continues to promote transparency and confidence-building measures in different areas and has been a committed participant in the process of establishing the Register of Conventional Arms. Proof of this commitment was the Argentine presidency of the group of governmental experts that met in 2019.

This chamber has witnessed numerous substantive meetings throughout its history, the results of which are set out in legal instruments key to the quest for a safer world, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The Conference must find its way back to its central place within the disarmament machinery. It must seize the opportunity to demonstrate that its work can continue to make a substantive contribution to maintaining international peace and security. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Argentina and now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Thank you. I hope you can hear me well.

The President: Ambassador, I am very sorry. The quality of the sound is too poor. I would suggest perhaps you try with a headset or earphones and, in the meantime, I will give the floor to the next speaker, the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to begin by wishing everybody a happy, healthy and successful new year.

The President: Ambassador, I am sorry. It seems that although you are wearing a headset, the sound is not good enough. I do not know what the problem is, so in the meantime let us try again with Pakistan. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Thank you. In line with the general format of today's meeting, let me share Pakistan's perspective on the drivers of the international security landscape and its –

The President: Ambassador, my apologies once again. It seems the interpreters cannot follow you. I do not know what the problem is, but in the meantime we will try with the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, first of all, on behalf of the Russian Federation, I would like to congratulate Belgium on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you and all the Presidents for 2021 patience and success in leading our forum in these difficult times. Of course, you can count on full cooperation in this from the Russian delegation. We hope that, together, we will all take the work of the Conference forward. I would also like to welcome our newly arrived colleagues and wish them the best of luck and success in their work here in Geneva.

In the past year, the pandemic has brought major changes to the work of international forums, effectively catching us all by surprise. We have had to learn new methods of communication on the fly. It took a long time and required the extensive use of resources, including financial resources. Now, as we have an idea of the challenges and difficulties the Conference may face this year, we will be able to plan our work over the entire session in advance, in view of the current circumstances. As they say, forewarned is forearmed. We believe that, over the past year, the secretariat of the Conference has accumulated relevant experience and will be able to support the work of the delegations adequately. We just need to create the conditions allowing the Conference to work predictably and stably, including from a financial point of view, even if it is not in the standard format we have used for decades.

We are sure that the mechanism comprising the six Presidents for the current year, the last President of the previous year and the first President of the coming year, which proved itself in 2020, will make a contribution to the smooth running of the Conference in terms of continuity. It shows that, together, we can resolve the problems of our Conference, albeit for the moment those of a technical or administrative nature. We are waiting for specific new ideas on organizing the work of the Conference from the Presidents and the secretariat.

It so happens that, in the midst of the current pandemic, the Conference is one of the few working disarmament forums remaining where a broad range of the most pressing issues of international security can be discussed. All these issues are reflected in the agenda, which has become only more relevant over time. Forty years on from the establishment of the Conference, these issues remain unresolved. For us, the delegations' primary task is to fulfil the Conference's mandate and begin negotiations as soon as possible or at least launch the pre-negotiation process with respect to the agenda items.

I would like to draw the attention of delegations to the real meaning of the adoption of the agenda, which is one of the most important documents of the Conference. This meaning derives from the goals and mandates of our forum. It also stems from the very participation by States in the Conference, which implies both consent and the obligation to hold negotiations on the agenda items we have adopted by consensus. In simple terms, adoption of the agenda is an automatic reaffirmation of the willingness of States to hold negotiations on any of the matters it covers – our common vision of the programme of work will determine how and on which specific matters such negotiations are conducted.

We believe that raising matters not directly related to the mandate and agenda of this forum and attempts to use them for political purposes create artificial barriers to progress. We hope that discussions during the 2021 session of the Conference will help bring us nearer to our main current tactical goal, which is the adoption by consensus of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work. Such a step would be a kind of declaration that the States

members of the Conference recognize the importance of resolving the issues on the agenda and are prepared to show the political will to begin negotiations on them. In order to begin in-depth substantive discussions, including to find common ground, there is no need to expedite the adoption of some kind of simplified programme of work.

With these considerations in mind, we have sent the Belgian presidency our comments on the previously circulated draft package proposal. We trust that our comments will be considered.

However, here it is necessary to assess realistically the current circumstances under which we will have to work. We believe that, before discussing a possible programme of work, we need to receive exhaustive information about the resources, especially the financial resources, we can expect to be available. Otherwise, our planning will be no better than guesswork.

The Russian delegation would not want to end up in a situation in which, after a few meetings, we are suddenly informed that the Conference needs to stop work owing to a lack of resources. Under the current circumstances, we must be practical and sensible. We must thus avoid being tempted to organize the work of the Conference according to the Napoleonic principle “first engage and then see what happens”.

Another important point, which our delegation wishes to underscore right now, at one of the first meetings: we are ready to work in a virtual format and, of course, participate actively, as always, in online meetings, but only if these meetings are dedicated to an exchange of views on agenda items and other general aspects of the Conference. If we get as far as in-depth comprehensive discussions – or, it goes without saying, negotiations – the drafting of documents or the adoption of landmark decisions, we will insist on at least a hybrid way of working.

The Russian delegation would like to reserve its second statement on substantive issues for one of the next meetings of the Conference.

Lastly, I wish to assure you that the Russian delegation is committed to constructive cooperation with all partners, in the interests of ensuring smooth and successful work for our forum.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation. I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President.

Let me again begin by wishing everybody a happy, healthy and successful new year. I would also like to join the others in congratulating you on assuming the first presidency of the Conference on Disarmament this year. I assure you of my delegation's full support for your endeavours to make progress in our work. In addition, I wish to extend my delegation's warm welcome to the Ambassadors and colleagues who have newly joined this important body.

Mr. President, we are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. That is the challenging reality. We also have tight schedules of meetings and conferences this year beyond the scope of the Conference on Disarmament, including the postponed tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Nevertheless, these unfavourable circumstances should not prevent us from embarking on the new year with a renewed sense of hope for progress in the Conference. However, we are called on to adapt to the new environment and difficulties and ensure that our work is still effective and relevant.

In this regard, I would like to express our deep appreciation for the work of the Belgian presidency and the secretariat, which has enabled us to embark on this year's discussions. Given the challenging situation and difficulties we have been facing, my delegation believes that we need to be realistic in our ambitions and practical in our approach this year.

In this sense, my delegation welcomes the group of the annual session's six Presidents' package proposal, including the draft programme of work, which was circulated some weeks

ago, and sincerely hopes that we will be able to reach a consensus at an early stage in this session.

In keeping with the tradition of the first plenary meeting of the new Conference session, I would like to briefly touch upon our priorities in the Conference.

The President: Ambassador, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I will perhaps ask you to reconnect. In the meantime, I give the floor to the representative of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Thank you, Mr. President. Having already congratulated you on assuming the presidency and assured you of my delegation's support when I took the floor at our meeting on Tuesday morning, let me begin by thanking everybody who has been involved in putting the arrangements in place to allow us to get this 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament under way. The limitations of this virtual format are clear, and we eagerly look forward to being able to resume in-person meetings as soon as the situation allows, but it is very important that we have been able to begin our work on schedule even in the current exceptionally trying circumstances.

Let me also add my welcome to those new colleagues joining us for the first time today. I look forward very much indeed to working with them. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and suffered hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic and our solidarity with all countries that have been affected. The pandemic only serves to underline the importance of the international community's working together to resolve global challenges. That goes for this Conference, too.

Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity briefly to set out the priorities for my delegation for the coming year. Our focus is clearly on the delayed tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which we very much hope can go forward in August. For fifty years, the Treaty has provided the framework for the extension of the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, for the minimization of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and for significant nuclear disarmament. At the Review Conference, we will celebrate this achievement and reaffirm our commitment to the Treaty in all its aspects.

While the Treaty is the indispensable and irreplaceable framework for plotting a course to a world without nuclear weapons, it is this Conference, the Conference on Disarmament, that is charged with negotiating the instruments that will turn that aspiration into reality. Given its membership and its mandate, there is no alternative body that can do that. As such, perhaps the greatest contribution this Conference can make to the success of the Review Conference is to show that it is ready to fulfil that responsibility, notably by commencing negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. My delegation continues to believe that there is no outstanding issue that cannot be resolved during the course of negotiations.

This Conference also has a crucial role to play in preventing an arms race in outer space. The United Kingdom was proud to be the original sponsor of General Assembly resolution 75/36, entitled "Reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours", and we were gratified and encouraged by the very broad support for it shown by Member States. That resolution mandates the United Nations Secretary-General to produce a substantive report on the question as a basis for further discussions, and we encourage all members and observers of the Conference on Disarmament to contribute to it. The resolution also invites States members and observers of this Conference to inform it of their national space security policies, strategies or doctrines, on a voluntary basis, in accordance with and in support of its mandate. We look forward to having the opportunity to do that during this session.

More broadly, my Government will soon publish the results of its integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy, which will define the long-term aims for our national security and foreign policy. We undertake to brief the Conference on aspects of the integrated review that pertain to the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons policy and to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control more generally once it is published.

Mr. President, we warmly welcome the proposal you circulated already in December 2020 on behalf of the six presidencies of this session for a package pertaining to a programme of work for 2021. My delegation has consistently supported both the creation of subsidiary bodies to work towards negotiating mandates on the core issues and consultations on issues related to the improved and effective functioning of the Conference. We also continue to support the proposal of the delegation of Australia to render the language of the rules of procedure gender-neutral. This is a specific technical measure which has no bearing on wider questions of the improved and effective functioning of the Conference and which should therefore face no impediment to swift adoption.

The events of the morning of Tuesday, 19 January, leave us under no illusions, however, that it will be easy to reach consensus even on issues which should be technical and procedural. I made my delegation's position on the blocking by Iran and Turkey of applications for observer status clear then and do not intend to repeat it now. I would simply express the hope that our actions for the rest of this session, beginning with the swift adoption of a programme of work on the basis of your proposed package, can serve to rebuild the credibility of this crucial body, recognizing the importance of the problems before us and the vital interest of all States in our success.

This month, as we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first meetings of the United Nations, in London, I would like to finish by remembering the words of a man who was present at the creation of the United Nations and went on to become a legendary United Nations official himself, Sir Brian Urquhart, who, sadly, passed away a few weeks ago at the age of 101. He once said of the United Nations: "Three fourths of the time you achieve nothing, but every once in a while, it works just enough to make it worthwhile. From day to day, one thinks it hopeless, but cumulatively it does work." Let us use our time this year wisely, work tirelessly, respectfully and creatively to bridge the differences that persist among us and make our Conference work just enough to be worthwhile. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. We will now go back to Pakistan. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. I will not go into greetings, which I have already covered, but will start with the main aspects of my statement – I will thus focus on our perspective on the drivers of the international security landscape and the related impacts, the role and relevance of the Conference on Disarmament and the priorities it should pursue in the year ahead.

Mr. President, over the past year the global political, security and economic order has deteriorated in several ways. There is palpable erosion of the rules-based international order. The fundamental fabric of multilateralism – that, is universal participation, adherence to the rule of law and respect for norms – is falling apart at the seams. Defiance and abuse of international law, often with impunity, by the big and powerful States is writ large. Accountability for such acts of commission and omission is nearly non-existent. Strategic, commercial and political interests continue to trump professed adherence to universal values. Unilateralism in various forms and manifestations and zero mindsets are ascendant.

Strategic asymmetries are growing as powerful States are continuing to seek absolute security and domination. Global military expenditures are on the rise. Modernization programmes of conventional and non-conventional weaponry are in full swing. Concurrently, the growing pace of weaponization, integration and operationalization of artificial intelligence in space and cybertechnologies is accentuating risks, driving an arms race and fuelling antagonism among great Powers.

These developments and trends are neither science fiction nor a description of the distant past. All of this is happening as we speak. If not halted and diverged, they portend far-reaching consequences for this Conference, its members and the regions they belong to. This is the global strategic environment in which the pursuit of the arms control agenda and the ability of this Conference to deliver will be tested.

These power dynamics and the normative erosion continue to unleash cascading geopolitical and security impacts on various regions and subregions. Each of the aforementioned dimensions – that is, power and arms asymmetries, wearing down of

established norms, defiance of international legality, lack of accountability and prioritization of interests over values – is in full display in South Asia.

The biggest State in the region, India, continues to pursue policies of hegemony, subversion and domination over its neighbours, all driven by an extremist ideology and hyper-nationalism. In view of this misguided zeal, and emboldened by a supply of advanced weapons and technologies, this nuclear-armed State is operationalizing offensive doctrines into war-fighting strategies. There is an unmistakable pattern and methods adopted by the Indian ruling party – that is, the staging of false-flag operations, externalizing blame and manipulating national sentiment to win elections.

This recklessness endangers regional peace and security in the region. A claimant to a permanent seat at the Security Council, India continues to defy with impunity the same Council's resolutions by further entrenching its occupation of an internationally recognized disputed territory. The self-professed largest democracy in the world, it has violated every tenet of international humanitarian and human rights law by locking down 8 million people, shutting down all means of communication and rejecting calls for independent investigations into its industrial-scale abuses in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Masquerading as a victim of terrorism, the Bharatiya Janata Party regime, inspired by a sentiment of racial superiority, has unleashed the most brutal State-directed terrorism on Kashmiri youth, women and civilians. This Government has also financed, abetted, facilitated and directed State-sponsored acts of terrorism against its neighbours. To camouflage this reign of terror, it has launched the world's most notorious disinformation campaign.

The lack of global accountability has enabled India to continue its defiance of international law, norms and rules. Unabated and generous provision of conventional, non-conventional and sensitive technologies has imbued this regime with an unparalleled sense that it can perpetuate occupation and foment terrorism with impunity. The international community, including the Conference on Disarmament, must call out this subversion of international legality. The failure to do so entails risks to regional peace and security in South Asia and beyond. The Conference cannot remain oblivious to these clear and present dangers.

Pakistan considers the Conference a vital organ of the multilateral security architecture, the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body and an indispensable part of the United Nations disarmament machinery. As the only forum where all militarily significant States participate on an equal footing to pursue arms control and disarmament, the Conference still has a unique role and place. However, this body will remain hamstrung by the effects of a tumultuous and fragile geopolitical and global security order.

The international bodies mandated to maintain international peace and security and to control arms have a duty to take cognizance of the strains at the global, regional and subregional levels. These bodies have a responsibility to halt and reverse the damage done to the rules-based global order as well as the arms control agenda. A revival of global consensus is therefore urgent if these challenges are to be dealt with. While, admittedly, a complex task, it remains the only viable option for the multilateral arms control machinery to function and deliver, particularly the Conference on Disarmament.

This consensus must be anchored in the faithful and demonstrable adherence to international law. It must contribute to enhanced security for all States at the lowest possible levels of armament, and special exemptions and subjective strategic interests must not be allowed to trump global and regional stability imperatives.

Pursuing outdated and failed approaches to arms control and disarmament will not yield results. Only through equity, non-discrimination, restraint and the recognition of the legitimate interests of all States can the Conference and other constituents of the disarmament machinery achieve meaningful outcomes.

The Conference has its own role and responsibility within this larger context. The options for its future work must be responsive to these challenges. Any Conference document that lacks appreciation of these larger realities has not worked for decades and is unlikely to

do so in the future. Arbitrary approaches, subjective notions of rightness and creative drafting have not worked in the past, nor would they going forward.

These actions have also prevented the Conference from addressing its most fundamental agenda item – that is, nuclear disarmament – for too long. In fact, the Conference has not been permitted for several decades to negotiate some of its oldest agenda items, with far-reaching significance for international security. Blaming the long-standing deadlock on the Conference's rules of procedure or methods of work does not stand the test of facts either. Several important treaties have been successfully negotiated with the same procedures and methods.

Pakistan remains firmly committed to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world that is achieved in a universal, verifiable and non-discriminatory manner. We support commencement of negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention to that end in the Conference without further delay. We also support the immediate start of negotiations in the Conference to conclude treaties on negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The latest developments related to outer space add to the urgency of concluding such treaties. Following nuclear disarmament, the issues of negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space have been on the Conference agenda for the longest duration and are the most ripe for commencing negotiations.

The global build-up of advanced weapons, platforms and means of delivery, together with rising tensions, highlights the urgency of dealing with nuclear risks and dangers. This makes work on the agenda item of prevention of nuclear war a high area of priority for this Conference. Should there be consensus, Pakistan also stands ready to join substantive work on other contemporary issues, such as chemical and biological terrorism, weaponization of cyberspace, lethal autonomous weapons systems and other types of destabilizing weapon systems.

As regards fissile material, calls by a few for a "cut-off-only" treaty, or a so-called fissile material cut-off treaty, as envisaged under the Shannon mandate remain diversionary tactics at best. A treaty that ignores asymmetries and fissile material stocks would erode rather than promote international and regional stability and security. Such a proposal has minimal disarmament value and serves only to freeze the status quo to the perpetual strategic advantage of a select few. That these asymmetries in our region are being further accentuated by generous external support speaks to the flawed and untenable nature of this outdated mantra.

On the other hand, Pakistan has called for a fissile material treaty that covers existing stocks in a verifiable manner. The Shannon mandate and the so-called fissile material cut-off treaty are a relic of the past. They are no longer valid in the current strategic environment in our region and its direct impact on our national security. Nor do they represent solutions to contemporary arms control and disarmament requirements. The time has come to work towards developing a new basis for negotiations on a treaty whose scope expressly encompasses existing stocks and applies equally to all States without discrimination. Any proposed treaty that is completely cost-free for its proponents while being disproportionately detrimental to the legitimate security interests of my country would remain a non-starter.

Mr. President, the Conference should continue to resume substantive work on all its agenda items. Drawing on what has worked and what has not remains imperative. It is vital that all agenda items be treated in a balanced and comprehensive manner. My delegation will continue to engage with you, Mr. President, and other members of the Conference to resume substantive work on all agenda items and, where agreeable, on new and emerging issues. We thank you for the proposed draft programme of work – we are examining it carefully and will provide feedback in due course. We will engage in this exercise constructively and upon the basis of the parameters I have outlined above. I thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan and will now move to the next speaker. Australia has the floor.

Ms. Mansfield (Australia): Mr. President, thank you so much. I join others in congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You of course take this role on at a challenging time, and I certainly wish to assure you at the outset

of the support of my delegation for your work and the work of the other incoming Presidents. Can I also use this opportunity to welcome all our new colleagues who are starting their work on disarmament in Geneva and to express my thanks to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament Madam Valovaya for her opening remarks on Tuesday.

These are quite clearly unprecedented times, and while we all aspire to a return to normalcy, it is really pleasing that delegations have shown flexibility in coming together in this virtual format to continue the important work of this body. And while we are realistic about the challenges that these circumstances present, we do see 2021 as an opportunity to think creatively about the work of the Conference. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed decades-old ways in which people work. It is an opportunity for the Conference, too, to change the way it works. It is clear that the pandemic has reinvigorated discourse about the necessity and value of multilateral cooperation. In particular, it has highlighted the critical role of multilateral institutions in addressing and coordinating a global response to a global problem.

With the international security environment continuing to be challenging, we need to use the multilateral tools we have at our disposal – and use them effectively – to address these challenges, including the Conference. In this context, it is worth noting that during the extensive consultations that Australia conducted during its Conference presidency last year, many delegations told us they thought the Conference should consider the lessons of the pandemic in the context of our work. A number of delegations raised this in their statements today and on Tuesday. These lessons span issues from how technology can better support our work to broader questions – about trust, for example, risk reduction, preparedness and the role of experts. We hope that delegations will draw on these lessons to bring fresh thinking and a sense of urgency to the work of the Conference in 2021.

Australia is very pleased to see strong collaboration among the six States that will hold the Conference presidency continuing this year. We welcome the early circulation by the group of the six Presidents of the draft package proposal for the work of the Conference over its 2021 session. We think the package provides a good basis for discussions and look forward to engaging in consultations on the draft. Australia will adopt a constructive and forward-looking approach to these consultations and stands ready to assist the group of the six Presidents in its efforts to secure a framework for our work as early as possible in the 2021 session.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Australia's position regarding the importance of hearing a diversity of voices in the work of the Conference, including from members and observers alike. I would also like to recall Australia's proposal for a technical amendment to make the Conference's rules of procedure gender-neutral, which we put forward during our presidency last year – and I thank France and the United Kingdom for raising these proposals positively in their statements today. We hope that this year's group of six Presidents will be able to move forward with this simple but important and symbolic technical update to the rules of procedure to demonstrate the importance of diversity and equality to the work of the Conference. We can all do more to integrate gender perspectives in the work of the Conference and to foster a more inclusive institutional culture.

There is much to be done on the disarmament agenda in 2021 and much to catch up on from 2020. Notably, we have the Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Already now it has been postponed twice and is currently scheduled for August. Australia aims for substantive outcomes from the Review Conference. We were pleased to work with our colleagues in the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative to develop a recommendations package for the Review Conference.

Cross-regional approaches such as the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative can help ensure that outcomes serve the interests of all States parties to the Treaty and are above regional politics or positions. We look forward to continued engagement with those States parties on the recommendations package over the coming months.

Australia remains firmly committed to the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons but considers that efforts to achieve this must be both practical and feasible. Experience tells us there are no shortcuts to disarmament. Australia is also committed to preserving space as a secure, safe and sustainable domain within the framework of

international law. We consider that the key to limiting the risk of conflict in space is ultimately international agreement and adherence to responsible behaviour and the mutual confidence that such behaviour promotes. Australia thus welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly last year of the resolution, led by the United Kingdom, on reducing space threats through norms, rule and principles of responsible behaviours. As an international community, we must give greater consideration to how we build international norms, transparency and cooperation in promoting responsible behaviour in space. The General Assembly resolution provides a pathway to do just that. Australia is now pulling together its views on these issues for submission to the United Nations Secretary-General, and we strongly encourage others to do so as well.

Mr. President, Australia looks forward to working closely with you and the presidential team and with Conference on Disarmament members and observers in these challenging times. We urge delegates to demonstrate maximum flexibility and creativity in their interactions with one another so that we can find areas of agreement. We can build trust and confidence in the work of our Conference and demonstrate to the international community that the Conference can once again deliver the outcomes needed from and expected of it. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Australia and will now go back to the Republic of Korea. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): First, we believe that the priority of the Conference on Disarmament should be commencing negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) as soon as possible. All the groundwork needed to begin has been done, including the report of the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group of 2018. It is our sincere hope that there will be chances to discuss this long-stalled issue in the context of the relevant subsidiary body this year.

Second, we as a collective body should address the growing threat from and to outer space and we should do so more proactively yet in a realistic manner. I believe we may all concur on the importance of this issue despite our differences of view regarding where and how to start addressing the challenges. The international community made progress in this regard with the adoption of a new resolution in the United Nations First Committee in 2020. This year, we hope that the Conference on Disarmament can take a step forward in this regard either through discussions in the relevant subsidiary body or, if possible, through separate thematic discussions.

Third, the Conference needs to pay further attention to challenges emanating from new and emerging technologies in the area of security and disarmament. As many of us would agree, the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the trajectory of the major forces shaping the modern world, and the radical acceleration of the digital revolution is one instance of such changes. It clearly also has implications in the field of security and disarmament. To ensure that the Conference is relevant in this changing world, there is a need to think beyond the agenda items which have traditionally been our focus.

The need for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula has been one of the keys to international peace and security. We continue to pursue concrete democratization and the establishment of lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. In doing so, our strong belief is that peaceful means such as dialogue and diplomacy are the only ways to achieve genuine and lasting peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, as President Moon Jae-in emphasized in his New Year's address. The key driving force in the Korean Peninsula peace process is dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation. Furthermore, a peaceful Korean Peninsula free of war and nuclear weapons is what we are obliged to pass down to posterity. To this end, we will continue to look to the international community for its invaluable support.

Last but not least, my delegation would like to reiterate the importance of the spirit and principles of multilateralism, which are needed more urgently than ever if we are to revive this historic platform. We believe that inclusiveness, among other things, should be duly and fully respected in the Conference as the first step to starting discussions on the important agenda before us and building much-needed consensus in the end.

Mr. President, my delegation is ready and willing to participate actively in the discussions of the Conference this year and contribute constructively to tangible outcomes. In doing so, the Republic of Korea will continue to embrace the spirit of cooperation and take a flexible approach not only with regard to substance but indeed on procedural and administrative matters as well. I thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea. We heard you very well this time. I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Arslan (Turkey): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the first presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2021. I assure you of Turkey's full support and cooperation in your endeavours to advance the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, the overall security situation, as well as the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, has unfortunately deteriorated, and trust among parties has further eroded in recent years. Hence, the stakes for achieving positive and result-oriented work at the Conference are higher than ever.

We are of the opinion that the stalemate that we are in today has not been created by the procedures, membership issues or international dynamics of the Conference. Turkey is convinced that the Conference possesses the mandate, rules of procedure and membership to discharge its duties. What we need is strong political will to resume the fundamental task – namely, negotiate legally binding international treaties. We are glad to see that your presidency is following up on the efforts that were started by the Algerian presidency. We would like to thank you for the revised draft package, which we are considering positively.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Turkey considers that the achievement of the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons depends first and foremost on the successful implementation of the Treaty regime. We must advance towards that goal through practical steps, consensus and with the active participation of nuclear-weapon-possessor and non-possessor States.

The NPT Review Conference will provide an opportunity for States parties to strengthen and reiterate their commitments to the Treaty and thus to nuclear disarmament efforts. Turkey is ready to work towards achieving a successful outcome at the Review Conference.

Turkey is also concerned that the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East has yet to be implemented. Turkey will continue to support constructive efforts in this direction.

About the observership of one entity, I would like to remind you that Turkey does not recognize the Greek Cypriot Administration, which does not represent the entire island. Turkey is a member which continues to act constructively in an environment where the programme of work was not expected yet. We would have expected the same constructive approach from the other Conference members. Unfortunately, our expectations were thwarted. We are ready to maintain our positive stance, to return to previous practice and offer a blanket acceptance of the list of observers. This is a major breakthrough. We are expecting members to acknowledge this constructive approach this year.

Let me conclude and reiterate our support to Belgium and the future Presidents of the session before us and wish them all success. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Turkey and now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Han Tae-song (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the first presidency of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you every success. My delegation is ready to extend full support and cooperation during your presidency.

The unexpected COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the work of the Conference, which holds an important mandate in the face of multiple challenges in global disarmament.

The President: Ambassador, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I am afraid the sound is not good enough to follow you, so we will have to return to you in a while. In the meantime, I will give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Mendoza Agudelo (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to begin by congratulating you on assuming the first presidency of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. I also take this opportunity to thank you and the other Presidents of this session for deciding to work together so that our discussions might produce the results that we all hope for. I also welcome the Ambassadors of Bulgaria and Cameroon, who will be among the six Presidents of the session and who will soon preside over our work, and the other Ambassadors who have arrived in Geneva in the past few months. We wish them every success in their new functions.

In 2020, reality forced us to be flexible and to adapt to a rapidly changing situation. My delegation hopes that this flexibility will remain with us during the session, so that we can regain the momentum that will allow us to fulfil our mandate. Although the member States have shown considerable determination to carry out substantive work this year, my delegation was concerned to see how, at last Tuesday's meeting of the Conference, the rule of consensus was again abused to politicize our work. For that reason, we join our voice to those of the many States that regretted that we were unable to include all those that had expressed a wish to participate in this session as observers. For multilateralism to be truly productive, it requires a constructive consensus in which all voices are included and agreements are reached through dialogue and by listening to those whose views are different from your own.

For Colombia, multilateralism and the international disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control regime are of unquestionable importance. The challenge we now face is to resume a constructive dialogue that will translate into feasible mandates, which will, in turn, serve to strengthen international peace and security. These are vital objectives, especially in today's deteriorating international security environment.

This year there will be a number of important events – the review conferences of the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to the Biological Weapons Convention and to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons – that will afford an opportunity to revitalize the disarmament architecture. On each of these stages, as well as in the Conference on Disarmament, we States must show through our actions that our position on multilateralism goes beyond words and that we truly are committed to the future.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my delegation's readiness to exercise the utmost flexibility and to support your proposals, beginning with the package that the six Presidents of this session have proposed. You can count on our willingness to work with you all to achieve substantive progress, in fulfilment of the mandate that we have been given. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Colombia and will now give the floor to the Ambassador of Mexico.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico): I was expecting to be given the floor later, but thank you very much, Mr. President.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

Allow me to congratulate you on assuming the first presidency of the year of the Conference on Disarmament and to express my delegation's support for your efforts to discharge your duties. I also take this opportunity to greet all delegations, to welcome new colleagues who are joining us and to wish everyone an excellent new year.

Mr. President, 2020 has been a year without precedent since the creation of the United Nations. The COVID-19 pandemic has painfully exposed our frailties. Its impact has shaped – and no doubt will continue to shape – the course of our deliberations in multilateral forums.

In the sphere of disarmament and non-proliferation, 2020 was a particularly difficult year not because of the lack of progress, which had also characterized previous years, but because the pandemic favoured the adoption of measures that resulted in an escalation of tensions – tensions in which the protagonists were none other than the countries with the

greatest responsibility for maintaining peace. Consequently, arms spending continued to rise and nuclear Powers continued to modernize their arsenals – contrary to their obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – and to fuel an arms race. There were even perceptible hints of a resumption of nuclear weapons testing.

The international disarmament architecture continues to be eroded, as evidenced by the lapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the denunciation of the Treaty on Open Skies by the United States and more recently by the Russian Federation. The renewal of the New START is also in question. As various analysts have pointed out, we are facing a multifaceted crisis whose resolution will require greater responsibility on the part of all international actors, particularly the nuclear Powers. Building back better requires concrete and timely action, and that is what we expect from this Conference.

Mr. President, to say that this forum is verging on irrelevance is putting it diplomatically. For decades, we have been hearing about the importance of keeping the Conference's work alive, despite the fact that it has failed to resume its negotiating mandate for twenty-five years. During the time in which I have participated in this forum, the frustration has only grown. It has grown because we have exercised maximum flexibility so that the Conference can move forward, only for some member to break with the consensus at the last moment under a questionable pretext. However, now that the world and multilateral forums must rise to a number of challenges, the Conference must demonstrate its usefulness.

We are pragmatic, Mr. President. We understand that reaching agreement on substantive issues will take time and require genuine exchanges. We must start with the basics, with a programme of work and – I must stress – a respectful environment in which all voices can be heard. We therefore deeply regret that, as we begin our work, some members chose to block the participation of observer countries in our deliberations. The abuse of procedure, to the detriment of multilateralism, is troubling. We hope that such actions are not repeated in the future and we respectfully but strongly call for Turkey and Iran to reconsider their objections and for Conference members in general to refrain from raising them in future sessions.

In terms of substance, we do not propose to reinvent anything. In 2021, while limitations on face-to-face negotiations remain, we would expect two tangible outcomes. The first is the resumption of last year's discussions on a programme of work, which will provide us with a structure for the meetings that we are able to hold this year. The second is a decision on the proposal by Australia to amend the Conference's rules of procedure to incorporate a gender perspective. These are modest steps, but they would go a long way in helping us return to the path of diplomacy.

Mr. President, there are new opportunities, to which previous speakers have already referred, on the disarmament agenda this year. I will mention specifically the 2020 NPT Review Conference, which should enable us to strengthen the validity and relevance of the Treaty as the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Tomorrow, 22 January 2021, will see the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, a new instrument that contributes to the fulfilment of article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and reinforces the conviction of its signatories and contracting parties that, given the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from the detonation of even a single nuclear warhead, these weapons are prohibited and must be eliminated.

We will work with you and with the subsequent presidencies in order to strengthen multilateralism. There is no better way to address the risks and vulnerabilities that we face than to join forces and work together. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Mexico. Dear colleagues, there are still some speakers on the list, but in view of the time, and because we have received three requests for rights of reply, I propose that we now hear those replies and that we resume the general debate next Tuesday, 26 January. We have five speakers for next Tuesday morning, starting with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Before giving the floor to the Syrian Arab Republic, may I ask the three delegations asking for the right of reply to make their replies as concise as possible. Thank you. The Syrian Arab Republic has the floor.

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I requested the floor to respond to the false and misleading allegations contained in the statement made by the representative of Israel. All Israel does is politicize the substantive international discussions and forums in which it participates in order to divert the attention of member States and cover up its continued violations of international law and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Israel is the only member State to play down the importance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It speaks of its ineffectiveness in the Middle East, which is to be expected, as Israel is the only State in the region that is not a party to the Treaty and refuses to place its nuclear facilities under the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In contrast, everyone knows that my country has been a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty since 1968, a signatory to the Biological Weapons Convention since 1972 and a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention since 2013. My country welcomed the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction and actively participated in the Conference held at the United Nations Headquarters in November 2019, against the backdrop of the boycott by Israel and its relentless attempts to thwart it.

Mr. President, Israel continues to violate the sovereignty of the States of the region, including Syria, by continuing to occupy the Syrian Golan and other Arab territories in Lebanon and Palestine, as well as continuing its aggression, launching rocket and air strikes in various parts of Syria and artillery and rocket-propelled grenades across the line of separation of forces in southern Syria, in flagrant violation of the 1974 separation agreement and the relevant Security Council resolutions. There is no need to recall the support provided by Israel for terrorist groups in Syria, particularly Jabhat al-Nusrah terrorists in southern Syria and across the separation line, under the guise of providing medical assistance, despite its being classified as a terrorist organization in accordance with the Security Council's lists of terrorist entities. The allegations made by Israel regarding the Syrian chemical file are baseless. Israel should ratify the Treaty and adhere to its provisions rather than lecture us on the implementation of obligations under the Treaty.

Although I am convinced that the Conference on Disarmament is technical in nature and is therefore not the appropriate place to talk about these issues, I must reiterate my country's strong condemnation of any use of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. Syria affirms that it has not used chemical weapons and will not use them because it no longer possesses them.

In 2013, Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention and has fulfilled its obligations resulting from the Convention, despite the difficult conditions it is facing and the enormous challenges posed by terrorism, occupation and acts of aggression. The President of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons–United Nations Joint Mission, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, confirmed in her report submitted to the Security Council in June 2014 that the Syrian Arab Republic had fully discharged its obligations and that its stocks of these weapons on board the United States vessel *M/V Cape Ray* and others had been destroyed, as confirmed by the Organisation, which oversaw the destruction of all chemical weapons production sites.

My country continues to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Declaration Assessment Team to ensure that the outstanding issues that have sparked discussion are resolved and that this file is closed once and for all. Moreover, Israel is hardly in a position to comment on issues in the field of disarmament, as it is not a party to all of the agreements approved by this Conference in the past and it continues to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and bombs. The Israeli arsenal of these weapons still represents the greatest threat to peace and security in the Middle East. This is an issue that has formed over decades and is still a formidable challenge

to the global arms and non-proliferation system. Israel continues to be responsible for the longest occupation of the peoples and lands of others in the modern era.

In conclusion, the proverb “those who live in glass houses should not throw stones” applies to Israel. Instead of lecturing us about adhering to international agreements on weapons, Israel should take the initiative to join and ratify these conventions as soon as possible, and the international community should put pressure on it to achieve this goal. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. I now give the floor to India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Thank you, Mr. President, since we are approaching the concluding time of the plenary meeting, I would seek your indulgence and the indulgence of the distinguished colleagues in the secretariat and our interpreters.

Mr. President, I am taking the floor to exercise India’s right of reply to the blatant abuse of the Conference on Disarmament once again by Pakistan today. Pakistan has made a habit of abusing the sanctity of every United Nations forum by spreading falsehoods and recycled lies. However, despite its desperate efforts, the world is able to see through its deceit. It is time to hold Pakistan to account and not let it misuse United Nations platforms to spread disinformation and hate and incite violence.

Pakistan has made a failed attempt to present baseless fabrications against India. As a responsible State, India strictly abides by its obligations under international treaties and needs no advice from a country which has a proven track record of illicit exports of nuclear material and technology. India’s security concerns are not confined to a region and therefore India has always approached these issues in a global context. Pakistan has also made a number of futile and unsubstantiated allegations against India, including in relation to Jammu and Kashmir. These do not merit a response, as they pertain to matters internal to India.

As an epicentre of terrorism, Pakistan is the biggest destabilizing force in the world. It has spurned the call of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for a global ceasefire by sponsoring cross-border terrorism. It has broken the principles that the United Nations stands for. While Pakistan’s Permanent Representative speaks about peace and security here, his Prime Minister glorifies Osama bin Laden as a martyr. Pakistan has become the epitome of duplicity. Prime Minister Imran Khan’s 2019 General Assembly address is quite vivid in our memory. He pulled out all the stops, exceeding the time limit, to demonstrate nuclear brinksmanship, threatening the international community with nuclear blackmail, and glorified terrorism and violence, the only characteristics which define his country and its leadership. He proved once again that Pakistan is the biggest threat to international peace and security.

We all know who – unlike India, which has taken a constructive approach to disarmament matters – has blocked the negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty on several occasions, including in 2009, when the Conference on Disarmament adopted a consensus programme of work. Having willingly joined the consensus on the programme of work, Pakistan made an absolute mockery of the world and this body by soon making a complete U-turn and blocking any work by the Conference. All of us continue to suffer because of such irresponsible behaviour by Pakistan.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament has just adopted its agenda, dealing with global issues relating to disarmament and international security. It is not a forum for bilateral or regional issues. As India has made clear several times, regional security issues have no place in the deliberations of the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference should not be distracted by Pakistan’s nefarious, ambitious designs and should reject its efforts to politicize its work and derail it from its mandate. Since I have already said what I need to say, I will not take the floor again to dignify Pakistan with a response or spend any more time on this issue out of respect for the work of the Conference on Disarmament under your able leadership and guidance. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India and now give the floor to the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. I apologize for taking the floor, but I will be very brief. I need to exercise my right of reply to comments that were made earlier today by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As I have said many times over the last six years, Iran is in no position to criticize any country in this body. It is the world's leading State sponsor of terrorism, and its claims to be a champion of multilateralism, as we know, are hollow and hypocritical.

Let me just say quickly that my Government hopes that Iran will end its malign behaviour and begin to play a constructive role in the Middle East and beyond. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America. I thank him especially for keeping his remarks very short. In the meantime, we have received two more requests to exercise rights of reply. We will take the first one. I give the floor to Pakistan.

Mr. Omar (Pakistan): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I have taken the floor to respond to the comments made just now by the Indian delegation. Mr. President, deflection, duplicity and disinformation are what define India's ruling party today. What we heard, yet again, amply testifies to these signature Indian traits. Let us take deflection first.

The Conference on Disarmament may recall that my delegation had asked for a denial of or a rationale for the several irresponsible statements made by Indian leadership on issues that are within the purview of this body. Instead of responding to these queries, the Indian delegation has chosen once again to deflect.

Let me now highlight the duplicity trait. Contrary to what Security Council resolutions have determined – that Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory whose final disposition is to be carried out by a United Nations-supervised plebiscite – the Indian delegation has once again chosen to resort to duplicity. Let me remind the Indian delegation that the Security Council has met three times since the illegal actions of August 2019 to specifically discuss the situation in the occupied territory arising out of India's illegal and unilateral actions that are contrary to the Council's decisions. The fact that the Security Council addressed this issue thrice is evidence enough to debunk Indian duplicity and the dubious claims that Jammu and Kashmir is an internal matter. Feigning amnesia while pandering to domestic constituencies cannot and will not change the facts of international law.

As for disinformation, the EU DisinfoLab has published "Indian Chronicles", which provide detailed evidence of India's leveraging of fake news and propaganda as a policy tool against my country. In February 2019, after staging a false-flag operation, India maligned Pakistan with terrorism-related allegations, stirred up hyper-nationalism in the country, claimed to have launched so-called surgical strikes and then deviously manipulated national sentiment in its bid to win elections. The pattern is unmistakable and has been repeated to suit the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh/Bharatiya Janata Party regime's electoral calculations. The transcript of the latest revelations provides further evidence of how the Pulwama attack – from false-flag operation to massive electoral success – was scripted and fully realized. They also demonstrate how the actions of this reckless regime, driven by domestic policy, are gravely imperilling regional peace and security. Today, the Indian delegation has further corroborated this evidence by churning out falsehoods.

Contrary to India's self-serving and facile mantra of cross-border terrorism, it is India itself which has long distinguished itself as the fountainhead of terrorism in the region. Can the Indian delegation deny that India's serving navy commander, Kulbushan Jadav, has aided, abetted and committed serious acts of terrorism inside Pakistan? Can the Indian delegation deny that members of the Bharatiya Janata Party – the ruling party of India – who have terrorism cases against them have been appointed ministers in this country? The Indian delegation would be well advised to realize that the Conference is not a sounding board for its falsehoods and eschew its futile tactics. Instead, this body is duty-bound to take cognizance of statements, policies and unlawful actions that imperil regional and international peace and security.

India's assertion of its security interests' transcending the regional or subregional context do not stand the test of any standard of objectivity supported by facts on the ground. Here are some facts: the overwhelming number of India's conventional and non-conventional

capabilities remains deployed and directed against Pakistan. India's obsession with Pakistan and its hegemonic mindset continue to be reflected at all times in its leadership's rhetoric. And it is disingenuous, to say the least, to try to assert security interests in a singular dimension or in isolation. Such a narrative disregards global consensus on the interlinkages of security matters between regional, subregional and global levels. Regional and subregional approaches, together with a global approach, are an agreed foundational component of disarmament discourse and deliberations.

Let me remind the Indian delegation that the outcome document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament considers bilateral and regional disarmament measures fundamental, stating that "agreements or other measures should be resolutely pursued on a bilateral, regional and multilateral basis with the aim of strengthening peace and security at a lower level of forces". The United Nations Disarmament Commission, in its 1993 guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament within the context of global security, states: "Regional and global approaches to disarmament and arms limitations complement each other and both should be pursued simultaneously." It in fact considers that "the regional approach to disarmament and arms limitation is one of the essential elements in global efforts to strengthen national peace and security".

For the past three decades, the General Assembly has continued to adopt, by consensus, a resolution on regional disarmament calling on the Conference on Disarmament to make progress on the entire range of disarmament issues and affirming that global and regional approaches to disarmament complement each other and should therefore be pursued simultaneously to promote regional and international peace and security. One wonders whether the Indian delegation has renounced these fundamental principles or is just using its signature deflection tactics in the context of the Conference.

India's reference to the so-called Abdul Qadeer Khan network is again testament to what old arguments it has resorted to. As the world knows very well, the so-called network comprised several people from over two dozen countries spanning four continents. Abdul Qadeer Khan's involvement in it was an individual act not sanctioned by the State. We thoroughly investigated his involvement and shared the findings with the International Atomic Energy Agency and other concerned countries, helping expose the international associates of this clandestine supply network. Mr. Khan was placed under strict restrictions which remain in place to this day. Other countries' nationals involved with the network did not meet the same fate and in most cases escaped punishment altogether. The issue is a closed chapter. Since this incident, Pakistan has taken a series of effective measures to preclude any possibility of such occurrences in the future.

And, Mr. President, as for the myth of India's so-called own impeccable non-proliferation record, let me remind you that India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 by diverting nuclear material from CIRUS, a reactor, in gross violation of its solemn safeguard commitments to the suppliers of that reactor. In fact, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which generously awarded India a waiver in 2008, was actually established in direct response –

The President: Excuse me. I am told that the interpreters are going to stop interpreting now, so I would like to invite the representative of Pakistan to come to the conclusion of his reply, especially in view of the fact that this is already the second time Pakistan has taken the floor in exercise of its right of reply. You have the floor.

Mr. Omar (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. Unlike India, Pakistan has not violated any of its international commitments or safeguard obligations in the development of its civil and military nuclear programmes.

India's gratuitous claims about its support for a fissile material cut-off treaty have been addressed previously by my delegation and are a part of the record of the Conference on Disarmament. India has neither declared a unilateral moratorium nor ceased the production of fissile material, its supply of which it continues to exponentially expand by building new fast breeder reactors. It also remains one of the biggest opponents of incorporating stockpiles within the scope of such a treaty. With these facts in view, India's grandstanding and diversionary tactics can best be described as delusional.

Finally, we again call on the Indian delegation to pursue objectivity and refrain from deflections, duplicity and disinformation and engage with this body in a responsible manner to address the serious questions of arms control and disarmament as a means to advance peace and security in South Asia and beyond. I thank you for your indulgence.

The President: I thank the representative of Pakistan. As I said, we will resume on Tuesday, 26 January, at 10 a.m. We will start with the remaining rights of reply and then move to the rest of the speakers on the list.

I would like to encourage delegates who are going to speak at Tuesday's meeting to send the text of their statements to the secretariat. This greatly facilitates the work of the interpreters, especially when the sound quality is poor. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.