

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Friday, 12 February 2021, at 3 p.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium)

The President: I call to order the 1557th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Before we proceed to our business for today, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly congratulate our Chinese colleagues on their New Year. The Year of the Ox has begun and I am told that the ox is a symbol for hard work that will pay off, so I hope this bodes well for the work of the Conference in 2021.

Distinguished colleagues, yesterday, the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference circulated documents CD/WP.633/Rev.1 and CD/WP.634/Rev.1 for your consideration. Before I open the floor for comments by delegations, I would like to say a few words on the changes that have been made to the previous texts.

On Wednesday, we came very close to adopting a programme of work and colleagues showed a lot of flexibility; however, a few delegations still had fundamental issues with the draft decisions proposed and were not able to join the consensus.

Following Wednesday's plenary, we therefore continued our efforts and consultations, together with the other Presidents, concentrating on these few fundamental issues in order to find compromises that would enable the delegations concerned to join the consensus. You have the results of those efforts in front of you. The two draft decisions contained in documents CD/WP.633/Rev.1 and CD/WP.634/Rev.1 were circulated by the secretariat yesterday afternoon on behalf of the group of six Presidents.

The main changes are, firstly, the modification of the title of the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.633, which was the only way for one delegation to be able to join the consensus. Secondly, there is the addition of a preambular paragraph to the text of the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.634 and the modification of the timetable for the subsidiary bodies annexed to it, treating all five subsidiary bodies in an equal way and clarifying the basis for their work. I know these changes represent a lot of concessions for many delegations, but I believe that the draft proposal in front of you also represents a delicate and carefully crafted compromise arrived at after much effort, a compromise that could enable the Conference to resume substantive work, which should be our common goal.

I now open the floor for comments on these two documents. The representative of Mexico has the floor.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, my delegation would like, first of all, to welcome Ambassador Lucy Duncan, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand, and Ambassador Alicia Arango Olmos, the Permanent Representative of Colombia.

My delegation also welcomes the recent ratification by Cuba of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. It leaves no doubt as to the commitment of Cuba to nuclear disarmament and to the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, which was endorsed by all countries in the region.

We also wish to congratulate all those delegations celebrating the beginning of the lunar year.

Mr. President, my delegation welcomes the close and efficient collaboration between the six presidencies of the 2021 session, building on the extensive consultations and joint work of their predecessors during the 2020 session. We welcome the fact that such collaboration is becoming a good practice, which is of great benefit to the Conference. In that regard, we would also like to express our appreciation for the work done by the delegation of Belgium during its presidency.

All delegations understand how complex and frustrating it can be to hold the presidency of this body, which is in decline and has for decades been plagued by serious deep-rooted failings.

During your presidency, you have had to deal with new challenges arising from the virtual format of the meetings. One of the main challenges has been to quickly find a way of holding the Conference's open informal sessions in order to avoid limiting consultations.

Mexico is aware of the difficult international backdrop and the need to strengthen any forum for dialogue that helps to enhance understanding. Since last year, we have hoped that recognition of this strong collaboration between the six presidencies and the need to avoid a repetition of situations like the one we experienced in 2019 would bring a new impetus to the work of the Conference. We know that 2020 was a complex and challenging year and that 2021 is not without its uncertainties and challenges, but we must rise to the occasion and make sure that this is not another lost year.

Mr. President, as all delegations know, the text of the draft decision on the programme of work, in its earlier revised version did not fully meet our expectations. Despite this, Mexico was prepared to allow it to take its course in order to give focus to the Conference's work and enable it to make progress in considering and recommending effective measures relating to the items on the agenda, with a particular focus on substantive elements regarding legally binding instruments. Although the language did not clearly reflect the mandate given to this body pursuant to the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, it did at least include clear benchmarks for measuring success, while at the same time providing constructive ambiguity about the nature of the discussions.

Now, however – and I must stress that we are still awaiting comments from our capital on document CD/WP.633/Rev.1 – we note with disappointment that some of the changes made have led to a text that will mean that the Conference will merely continue in the same manner as in 2018, a manner that my delegation has described as not very productive, and that, if repeated, risks becoming institutionalized in the future. This is not acceptable.

We believe that the title of the decision as it stands is vague and brings us back to the eternal debate on the programme of work.

The change in the third preambular paragraph seems to us to repeat the spirit of the sixth preambular paragraph. To avoid any confusion, we believe that it will need to be qualified using previously agreed language, perhaps that of the decision contained in document CD/2119, to reflect the fact that substantive work means work which is carried out in fulfilment of the mandate of this Conference, as set out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

For the reasons I have stated, we do not consider it appropriate to establish a link with the 2018 subsidiary bodies process in the decision for the implementation of the decision on the work of the Conference.

The language used in the timetable for the work of the subsidiary bodies bodes ill for the sincerity of the exercise. If we cannot even refer to specific issues that have been discussed in the Conference and agreed upon in previous decisions and that were even included in the decision contained in document CD/2119, it will be almost impossible for them to be discussed properly in accordance with the Conference's negotiating mandate.

Furthermore, my delegation has been clear that the reports of the subsidiary bodies contained in documents CD/2138, CD/2139, CD/2140 and CD/2141, which are valuable in terms of quality and quantity of information, are mainly descriptive and reflect the diverging views. They do not generally demonstrate progress in terms of a mandate to consider effective measures, including legal instruments for negotiation. Therefore, we can hardly consider them the basis for work on any initiative for this year or give them priority over other documents and decisions on agenda items.

Worse still, subsidiary body 4 would be working in a vacuum. There is no prior report or official record of the groundwork, as it was carried out purely in informal meetings. This seems to us inappropriate and a reflection of the lack of seriousness in the approach to this exercise.

Mr. President, the Conference's mandate is to negotiate. Mexico is convinced that the continuing differences between countries can and should be addressed in negotiations, which are what allow us to move towards agreement. Expecting all these differences of opinion to have been resolved before beginning proper negotiations is illogical and simply leads to delays.

In all international forums, my delegation has consistently and coherently positioned itself, against the abuse of consensus and its use as a veto tool, particularly in procedural matters. Certainly, for my delegation, the text of the earlier version was a better basis than the current one. My delegation stands ready to continue efforts to arrive at a text that is useful to the Conference and avoids consolidating its irrelevance.

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

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, we have just heard a very interesting statement from our Mexican colleague. I share many of his concerns, but I think his main message was that we must move forward, show flexibility and political will, so that we can actually begin substantive work at the Conference on Disarmament this year.

To that end, we would like to add a few specific proposals to the two documents under discussion, which we believe could somewhat alleviate certain concerns about the future work of the forum and allow us to reach a compromise today.

I will begin with CD/WP.633/Rev.1. As our Mexican colleague remarked, the preamble to this document contains some duplicate provisions, including in the third and sixth preambular paragraphs. The latter repeats the former, not only in substance but almost word for word. We therefore propose deleting the sixth preambular paragraph of CD/WP.633/Rev.1, which reads:

(*spoke in English*)

“Seeking to advance the substantive work of the Conference”.

(*spoke in Russian*)

With the revision made to the third paragraph, we consider this paragraph superfluous.

Now, about the operative part of the document, specifically paragraph 3. I agree with the representative of Mexico that, if we agree to paragraph 3 in its current form, we are somewhat diluting the mandate of our Conference, which directly obliges us to engage in negotiation work and produce legally binding instruments on the different agenda items. I would therefore like to propose that we amend the first sentence of paragraph 3 of the operative part of CD/WP.633/Rev.1 as follows – I will read in English:

(*spoke in English*)

“The aim of the subsidiary bodies established under this Decision will be to consider legal instruments for negotiations and recommend other effective measures, in line with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.”

(*spoke in Russian*)

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, in this proposal, we use almost no new words but simply change their order. We believe that, given the Conference’s mandate, this word order is more in line with the work we must carry out in the Conference, based on the obligations deriving from our membership of this forum.

Now I would like to speak about CD/WP.634/Rev.1. First of all, I would like to draw the delegations’ attention to the title of the document and propose amending the preposition before the year from “in” to “for”, which would match the new title of the previous document, meaning that the title of the document would read as follows:

(*spoke in English*)

“Draft decision for the implementation of the decision of the work of the Conference on Disarmament for 2021”

(*spoke in Russian*)

This will also harmonize the titles of the two documents, CD/WP.633/Rev.1 and CD/WP.634/Rev.1.

Now, regarding the mandates of the subsidiary bodies, which are set out in the timetable for the work or meetings of these subsidiary bodies. Overall, we agree with the language used for the revised draft. However, we suggest that it would more clearly correspond to our intentions and plans if we were to change the order used in the description of the mandates of these bodies. Specifically, we propose, for all the subsidiary bodies except subsidiary body 4, to slightly change the language by changing the order of the elements of the individual sentence. That means, for example, that we think the mandate of subsidiary body 2 should read as follows:

(spoke in English)

“Prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters, taking into account previous discussions and documents of this agenda item, including document CD/2139.”

(spoke in Russian)

I should explain that we are proposing to amend the word order of the mandates in the same way for all the subsidiary bodies, except subsidiary body 4. Once again, I think that this will better express our intentions and plans for the work of these bodies and will also give a more focused signal for their work.

As regards the new paragraph in the preambular part of the document, I think it is absolutely appropriate, since we need to somehow express our intentions to make progress compared to 2018, we need to reflect a certain development in our views on the work of the Conference, and so we fully support the inclusion of this paragraph.

To conclude, I think it would be useful if the delegations were to discuss this proposal of the Russian Federation that I have just explained immediately, and I would like to ask my colleagues to speak on that subject.

I note that we are genuinely close to a consensus on the drafts of these two documents, perhaps just one step away. I think that the Russian proposals will only help shorten and hasten that step.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation and give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): I would like first of all to pay tribute to the Belgian presidency, as well as to those who took part in the informal drafting meeting which, it seems, took place yesterday with the aim of producing these revised draft decisions. I think that, even though these new draft decisions include some element of ambiguity and also deviate to some extent from the established language, they do constitute a very good basis for our work and will enable us to engage in substantive work and emphasize the shared importance of fulfilling the core mandate of this august body. We have sought instruction from Tokyo and I would like to say that Japan fully supports these two drafts. The ambiguity or new wording will give us greater room for the flexibility that is a very important element at this juncture.

I very much appreciate the views and new proposals made by the previous speakers, but now time is running out and we are eager to begin substantive work. There may still be room to improve the documents, but I would like to see the commencement of our substantive work on these decisions, which provide an adequate framework for our future work during the session of this year.

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

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Mr. President, we have transmitted the latest revised version of the rapporteurs' draft decisions on the establishment of subsidiary bodies, CD/WP.633/Rev.1 and CD/WP.634/Rev.1, distributed by the secretariat yesterday evening, to our capital and we are still awaiting final instructions, but we believe that the text is closer to being acceptable to us. If I may, I would like to make the following remarks on the basis of which we may join the consensus.

First, the amendments that have been made to the titles of the draft decisions have, to some extent, addressed our concerns by making them consistent with the content of the draft decisions.

Second, in its current form, the eighth operative paragraph of the decision in document CD/WP.633/Rev.1 takes account of the concerns we have expressed in previous meetings of the Conference.

Third, the instructions from our capital are still to amend the third operative paragraph by replacing the words “effective measures” with the expression “the nature and scope of legal instruments for negotiations”, but we believe that consensus on the amendment just submitted by the Russian delegation could respond to our concerns with respect to this paragraph.

Fourth, with regard to the second draft decision, in document CD/WP.634/Rev.1, our delegation has on more than one occasion stressed the need for an equal approach to all the proposed subsidiary bodies in terms of content and timetables. We acknowledge the improvements incorporated into the latest revised draft in this regard, but the new language raises concerns about the institutionalization of the work of these bodies within the framework of the work of the Conference, as it is stated that the work of these bodies should be based on the reports of the subsidiary bodies for 2018. At the same time, we recognize the importance of the work done by these bodies in 2018. We therefore agree with the amendment proposed by the Russian delegation, which could address our concerns in this regard.

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

Mr. Sánchez De Lerín (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I believe that the proposal before us today is not perfect. We could no doubt work for days, weeks or months to improve it, but in two weeks’ time our ministers will be here talking at the Conference again and I think they have more than enough reason to be dissatisfied and to feel that this Conference is not doing its job, because we cannot even agree on something as simple as the programme of work.

I think we need to start working on substantive discussions now. I think we need to have a programme of work now. That is why the delegation of Spain is willing to make huge sacrifices in many aspects of these two decisions and stands ready to approve them today in order to start working on substantive issues on Tuesday.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Spain. I give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to congratulate the great nation of China and its Government on the occasion of the new year and wish them prosperity and success.

Mr. President, we have made important steps with regard to the programme of work and now, with the new amendments and new versions, we have a new draft that needs further consideration by all delegations. We believe that there should be enough time for all delegations to consult with their capitals and get the necessary instructions in order to have all of them on board. Having said that, I would like to share with you some comments as a preliminary reaction to the new drafts.

We welcome the reinstatement of operative paragraph 8 in document CD/WP.633/Rev.1. Then, Mr. President, since the so-called presidential statement is off the table now, we propose amending the timetable for the work of the Conference on Disarmament, contained in document CD/WP.633/Rev.1, and deleting the “other organizational questions” items. We need to take a balanced and comprehensive approach towards the subsidiary bodies; there should be consistency in the proposed draft and we must avoid any contradictory wording or limitations on our activities, as many delegations said clearly during yesterday’s informal consultations. In 2018, some subsidiary bodies did not produce any report, some of them produced a detailed adopted report and some only a personal reflection.

To clarify my proposal, I would like to refer to operative paragraph 3 of the decision contained in document CD/WP.633/Rev.1: at the end of that paragraph, we have the phrase “taking into consideration all relevant views and proposals, past, present and future”. We believe that this is common wording that has been used over the years in proposals for the draft programme of work. However, we now have the wording “building upon” in the preambular part of the decision contained in document CD/WP.634/Rev.1 and “on the basis of” in the timetable for the subsidiary bodies. In the interests of a comprehensive and balanced approach and in order to be consistent, we previously proposed replicating the agenda items in the wording related to the subsidiary bodies, without any further details. In line with that proposal, my delegation would like to propose to use, in document CD/WP.634/Rev.1, the phrase “taking into consideration all relevant views and proposals, past, present and future” instead of “building upon” in preambular paragraph 2 and instead of “on the basis of” in the timetable for the subsidiary bodies. At the same time, we are ready to consider the proposal that our colleague from the Russian delegation has just made.

Mr. President, I would like to express our readiness to cooperate constructively with you and with the other Presidents of this session of the Conference on Disarmament and adopt a programme of work that will enable this august body to fulfil its negotiating mandate in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

The President: I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President, for the words of congratulation that you extended at the beginning of the meeting to China and a number of other Asian countries on the occasion of the Lunar New Year. I also wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the colleagues who have offered us best wishes just now.

With regard to the texts that you submitted yesterday afternoon after consultation, although in Beijing it is the first day of the Lunar New Year holiday, thanks to the hard work of our colleagues in Beijing and in our delegation, I have now obtained the capital’s approval, and we can accept, or live with, the text submitted yesterday.

At the meeting today, we have also listened attentively to the proposed amendments put forward by some of our colleagues. I believe they have proposed these amendments with a view to further improving the text. I respect them and attach great importance to their views. Therefore, our delegation is willing to continue discussions on this decision on the work of the Conference at today’s meeting, under your guidance.

I still believe that we are very close to reaching an agreement. As you said, the Year of the Ox is a propitious year. It also has an important metaphorical meaning. The Year of the Ox represents determination and the energy to move forward. So today, the first day of the Lunar New Year, I hope that we in the Conference will be able to greatly benefit from this good omen, continue our work and strive to reach agreement on our draft decision as soon as possible.

My colleagues have even prepared a glass of wine for me, to ring in the New Year and to help to celebrate our agreement. Let us continue our efforts, and I wish all the best to everyone for the New Year!

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China. I give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Mr. President, I wish a happy new year to our Asian colleagues and a warm welcome to our colleagues from New Zealand and Colombia.

Just for the record, Mr. President, we thank you for the new draft. Our preference would be for the previous draft but, in a spirit of compromise, we can live with this text. We appreciate that the proposals being made are possible because of some concessions that we have made. I came here with instructions on the understanding that we had reached a compromise yesterday, and my instructions concern that compromise. We realize that a very delicate compromise was reached in 2018 and that is mainly reflected in document CD/WP.634/Rev.1, which addresses the timetable and the naming of the subsidiary groups.

As this was the consensus reached in 2018, we would prefer to have similar names for the subsidiary groups. We all know that we had a compromise and consensus on four documents in 2018. The compromise we reached yesterday was that we would base our work in this year's session in the subsidiary groups on these documents and on the work and the progress achieved in subsidiary body 4. That was the understanding we reached yesterday. While our preference would be for your previous proposal, in a spirit of compromise, we can agree with the proposal you have put forward today.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to respond to some of the comments made by my colleagues. First of all, I think that our time really is limited, but we still have enough of a starting point to achieve a genuine consensus decision on these two documents.

I support the proposal made by my Syrian colleague and my Chinese colleague, who found the time on this holiday to take part in the work of the Conference on Disarmament and give his opinion on the circulated documents. The opinion has been expressed that we need to continue our work so we can adopt documents that really meet our requirements. I am not talking about the requirements of the Russian Federation but rather about those of the Conference. In this regard, I would once again suggest that my colleagues discuss the comments I made just half an hour ago.

Unfortunately, we also have instructions from the capital, and those instructions do not yet allow us to join a consensus on the two documents in the form they were circulated here, without consideration of the new Russian comments.

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

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, I have asked for the floor to exercise my delegation's right of reply in response to the remarks made by the United States representative in the previous plenary meeting. It is true to say that Iran has been in overcompliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, particularly following the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the multilateral agreement endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2231 (2015), which the United States whimsically pulled out of and still remains a tremendous violator of. Iran has undergone the most robust of inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, in the words of that organization's Director General, while the United States continues to be a persistent violator of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015). Perhaps the United States representative has given a new definition not only to the implementation in good faith, witnessed by the international community, of the commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but also to nuclear disarmament, as if nuclear arms reduction were a substitute for nuclear disarmament under article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is crystal clear that the United States has a long tradition of violations and non-compliance with the obligations under articles I, II, IV and VI of that treaty.

Once again, Mr. President I would like to reiterate the exclusively peaceful nature of my country's nuclear programme.

The President: I thank the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I now give the floor to the representative of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): My apologies for taking the floor, Mr. President, but I need to respond to once again these ridiculous accusations coming from the representative of Iran.

I repeat that the United States is in full compliance with its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations – we have been and we continue to be. It is Iran and its previous activities that are of concern to the entire international community. So let us be straight here: it is Iran that has a lot to answer for on this issue, not the United States.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States. There are no more speakers on the list.

Distinguished colleagues, objections have been raised on the two documents put to your consideration. It is clear that consensus on these two documents cannot be reached today.

Over the past six months, the group of six Presidents of this year's session has worked tirelessly to get us as close as possible to a proposal that could be agreeable to all. We have consulted widely since the fall of last year and we have closely examined the range of issues brought to us by delegations with the aim of bringing the Conference back to work. We have sought to offer a programme of work that would allow substantive discussion on all items of the agenda and enable us to resume our work. The fine line to a consensual decision is, however, very fragile. We have witnessed it over and over again during these last decades in the Conference and we have witnessed it again last Wednesday and today.

So, we have not been able to garner consensus today, but the work is not over. The group of six Presidents remains as committed as ever to bringing the Conference back to work and we hope we can garner consensus under the Brazilian presidency. Next week my Brazilian colleague, Ambassador de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão, will preside over the Conference on Disarmament. I wish him and his team all the best and I assure him that he can count on my support.

Before giving the floor to the Ambassador of Brazil, I will give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Mr. President, I would like to note your delegation's dedication and hard work in this quest to find compromise and enable the Conference on Disarmament to adopt the two decisions you put before us.

I would also like to commend the group of six Presidents of this year's session of the Conference for the months of fruitful discussion and solid planning that have brought us to this point. The United States heeded your call, Mr. President, and did its utmost to show flexibility. As I said in Wednesday's meeting, while not happy with some aspects of the proposed programme of work, my delegation believes it offers the best opportunity we have for getting the Conference on Disarmament back to work. I am afraid that the prospects for making progress in the Conference this year are now quite bleak. The United States had hoped that the agreement to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty reached by the Russian Federation and the United States last week could serve as a pathway to return this body to a spirit of negotiation and compromise. Sadly, certain member States of the Conference have completely failed to show flexibility or compromise, Mr. President, despite your frequent and urgent appeals. Nevertheless, the United States stands ready to continue to work to achieve the aims of the Conference on Disarmament. Mr. President, thank you again for your service and your efforts.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States for his kind words to the presidency and I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, I would also like to thank you on my own behalf and that of our delegation for the efforts you and the other Presidents of the current session have made to achieve a consensus and finally to adopt the documents needed to begin substantive work at our forum. The efforts really have been colossal. We thank you for the consultations you held directly with our delegation and those which you organized for a smaller number of participants.

Unfortunately, I must express my disappointment with today's meeting, because our delegation has tried to act in an open and constructive manner. However, the refusal by most delegations to discuss the Russian proposals here at this meeting shows their unwillingness to participate in an in-depth and thoughtful discussion of specific proposals. That is rather disappointing. They are thereby impeding the discussion of really important issues and so obstructing the achievement of a consensus.

If we are not going to discuss the proposals of other delegations, that will definitively lead the Conference on Disarmament into a dead end we will never be able to get out of. Therefore, I would once again call on the delegations first of all to look carefully at the Russian proposals and also of the proposals made by other States. With an open and constructive discussion, we really could have reached a consensus today. Unfortunately,

many delegations who remained passive did not want to do that. This is a matter of serious concern for our delegation.

The President: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Mr. President, I had not intended to take the floor, but allow me to take the opportunity to congratulate you and your team, along with the rest of the group of six Presidents of this year's session of the Conference on Disarmament, for the tireless efforts you have made in these last four weeks to bring us to consensus on a programme of work, as well as the other difficult issues you had to deal with at the beginning of this session.

I did feel compelled to take the floor, however, to respond to what my distinguished Russian colleague has just said. I thank him for his proposals, which we will of course, study carefully. I did not, however, hear anybody rejecting his proposals. I did hear two or three delegations say that they were still waiting for instructions from their capitals and that they needed more time to consult. We have to respect that, although we were disappointed, of course, because my delegation certainly came here today ready to join a consensus on the documents that were circulated yesterday. Having heard those delegations say they need more time, we must, of course, give them more time, and that then gives us the time to study the Russian proposals made today, which we are very ready to do. But I certainly did not hear anybody reject those proposals, so I would not want my colleague to go away with the impression that that had been the case. Of course, as we are still waiting for those two or three delegations to consult with their capitals, we will be ready to come back next week under the presidency of the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil to continue our discussions.

But once again, let me reiterate that we were ready today to join the consensus and to restart our substantive work, and I very much hope that we are all able to do that, rather than tinkering around to find the perfect formulation, which I suspect will forever elude us. We should not let the best be the enemy of the good but, rather, get on with the work in hand. I assure you, Mr. President, the other members of the group of six Presidents and the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil of our full support for getting us back to substantive work.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom and I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Rosandry (Indonesia): Mr. President, Indonesia appreciates your continued efforts, including through informal consultations on the draft position, that have brought us to this point.

As we have mentioned since the last plenary meeting and during the consultations, Indonesia considers that neither of the proposals in the two draft decisions lives up to our expectations. However, we find them to be a basic minimum for the Conference on Disarmament to start its substantive work. It is time for us to rebuild our trust in order for the Conference on Disarmament to move forward. We indeed regret that consensus cannot be achieved at this point. In that regard, we would like to urge our colleagues to exercise their utmost flexibility in order to allow the Conference to resume its mandate, as is long overdue.

To conclude, Mr. President, Indonesia would like to thank you and your team, as well as the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session, for the efforts undertaken over the past two months. Indonesia also wishes all the best to the Brazilian presidency and assures it of our continued support through the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the representative of Indonesia and now give the floor to the Ambassador of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your very able handling of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You certainly had one of the most difficult jobs and went to great lengths to try to bring us to consensus on a programme of work for this year. And I would like to thank you wholeheartedly for your untiring efforts and the fact that we were very, very close to agreeing on the documents that you presented yesterday and which we were ready to agree on and adopt today.

And I would also like to say to my distinguished Russian colleague that, of course, we are happy to engage on his proposals, and we look forward to doing that next week when we meet under the next presidency.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Germany for his statement and his kind words.

(spoke in French)

I now give the floor to the representative of France.

Ms. Delaroche (France) *(spoke in French)*: Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to react to the conclusions drawn by the delegation of the Russian Federation from today's meeting, which are surprising, to say the least. I would just like to point out that the large number of amendments that were proposed today by the Russian Federation require careful consideration. Delegations cannot be expected to react immediately to substantial amendments put forward at the last minute. My delegation was ready to support your last proposal, Mr. President, and we offer you our full support.

To end on a note of encouragement, I would like to thank you once again for all your efforts. I want to assure you that they were greatly appreciated and to commend you again for your dedication and commitment to the work of the Conference.

The President: *(spoke in French)* I thank the representative of France for her kind words.

(spoke in English)

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Elsayed (Egypt): Mr. President, Egypt considers that the utmost priority of the Conference on Disarmament at the beginning of its annual session is to adopt a balanced and comprehensive programme of work. The responsibilities entrusted to the President of the Conference under the rules of procedure, in particular rule 29, are quite clear. We firmly believe that the impasse in the Conference on Disarmament should not persist and that we must spare no effort in trying to break the deadlock and resume our substantive work. And, more importantly, let us not achieve this at the expense of the rules, principles and basic tenets of the Conference.

We fully recognize the difficulties that the Conference has been facing in trying to adopt a programme of work. And, out of our commitment to the purposes and objectives of the multilateral disarmament machinery, with the Conference on Disarmament at its heart, we upheld the concepts of constructiveness and collective action above our own limited interests. On several occasions, although we were not entirely comfortable with many aspects of the proposals on the table, we decided to exercise maximum flexibility to allow the Conference to resume its work.

Mr. President, since the beginning of this year's session, we have supported the proposed draft, given that it is, logically, based on the draft programme of work that was presented by the Algerian presidency last year. And along the way we have constructively engaged in the efforts to make it acceptable to everyone. Although the proposal that was put for adoption during the last session was not perfect, we were ready to adopt it, as it was the result of a transparent and inclusive process.

Mr. President, we have been listening very carefully to the interventions made by delegations today, we attach great importance to all the views expressed and we are willing to study those proposals with a positive mindset. And we believe that we should be able to reach an agreement in the coming weeks.

The President: I thank the representative of Egypt. I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. September (South Africa): Let me start by expressing our gratitude for the efforts of all of you: the secretariat, the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference and your team. I am well aware that you started the consultations late last year. I would be failing in my duty if I did not congratulate you on the transparent manner in which you have

carried out your responsibility, as well as for your dedication and perseverance. South Africa has stated before that we all have the responsibility to get the Conference on Disarmament to resume its substantive work and regain its position as a responsive, responsible, multilateral institution that can effectively contribute towards building a new consensus on matters affecting our common security. We would like to assure you that we will support the incoming President in the same manner as we have supported you and make our contribution to moving the Conference on Disarmament forward. Unfortunately, it is a relay race, and at some point you have to hand over the baton. In closing, let me assure you that the South African delegation remains flexible and offers you its continued support and cooperation.

The President: I thank the representative of South Africa for his kind words for the presidency. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Austria.

Mr. Müller (Austria): First of all, I would also like to congratulate our Chinese and Asian friends on the beginning of the new year. I am a bit disappointed that the Chinese Ambassador will now have the pleasure of drinking his wine to celebrate only the new year and not yet the adoption of the two decisions in front of us.

I had no intention of taking the floor because I came here virtually to support you and the endeavours of the Belgian presidency, together with the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference, who, on the basis of long negotiations and consultations came up with a very carefully written compromise proposal.

The latest version clearly did not meet all our priorities and I have some sympathy with my Mexican colleague who reminded us very eloquently that the important thing about the Conference on Disarmament is the mandate to negotiate.

Though we drew a somewhat different conclusion from that, we wanted to really support you, at least to allow the Conference on Disarmament to move forward. Unfortunately, not everyone in the room is able to support you yet, though I think 99 per cent of us are in favour of the proposal we have in front of us.

I also note the argument of the representative of the Russian Federation about the importance of time. I wish that his delegation had made some of their proposals a little bit earlier, as that could have given other delegations more time to study them.

However, my delegation stands ready to continue to study and work on their proposals. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the United States delegation, which I think has shown remarkable flexibility by agreeing to these two decisions in front of us. We also have some sympathy with their approach of focusing on the need to discuss efficiency. They have shown some flexibility on this, and I wish that other delegations had shown equal flexibility at this very final stage of your presidency. So I am afraid you cannot yet drink a glass of wine to celebrate the adoption of these two decisions. But of course, we stand ready to continue with the next President.

Thank you, Mr. President, for your outstanding efforts in bringing us very, very close to the finishing line.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Austria for his kind words and I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, first of all, my delegation would like to congratulate the delegation of China and our Asian colleagues on the beginning of the lunar year and convey to them our best wishes for the new year.

My delegation would like to acknowledge and thank you for the hard and valuable work you have done in the challenging role of the first President of the Conference's annual session.

Mr. President, my delegation was ready to support the proposal put forward by the presidency yesterday, as we understand that the text of that proposal reflected a compromise solution reached after long, tireless and sensitive negotiations. My delegation is ready to continue discussing the new proposals presented by delegations today, and in that regard I would like to assure the Ambassador of Brazil, who will be assuming the presidency of the Conference next week, of the fullest cooperation of the delegation of Argentina in working

to reach consensus on a proposal that will enable us to resume our substantive work in the Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina. And I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I was not intending to take the floor this afternoon, but I would like to congratulate all the countries that are celebrating the Lunar New Year today.

I would also like to point out that my delegation too was prepared to join the consensus on the new version of the document that you distributed yesterday evening, but it seems that we are not quite there yet. My delegation will nevertheless support the Brazilian presidency as it takes up its functions next week. I would also like to thank you and your team for the tireless effort you have put into your work, both prior to and during the month of your presidency.

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

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): I would like to join the other speakers in thanking you and the other Presidents of this session for the enormous efforts you have made to reach consensus on the proposed documents.

I came to this afternoon's plenary meeting ready to join the consensus; even though our preference is for the previous text, we are ready to join the consensus in the spirit of compromise and flexibility.

We have actually had a very good start to this year, with the announcement of the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. We hope we can continue with this good momentum and so contribute to revitalizing the important work of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you and the next President of my delegation's full cooperation and support.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea. And I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Mr. President, we deeply appreciate the transparent and able manner in which you have conducted your presidency. We commend you for the extensive consultations that you undertook, which eventually led to the presentation of proposals that met with the approval of nearly everyone.

We, for our part, demonstrated maximum flexibility and engaged constructively with you and other delegations, even though the proposals did not fully meet our expectations. We were still ready to join a consensus. While we regret the lack of consensus, we think that this malaise, this impasse, is not entirely surprising. My delegation has drawn attention to the external realities that have prevented this conference from resuming its work. Going forward, it will therefore be important to pay heed to and address the root causes of the malaise that afflicts this body.

In our view, progress, even if incremental, is possible in the future. How can we achieve that? It would require adopting a balanced and comprehensive approach; we would all need to resist the temptations of arbitrary notions and grandstanding.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan for his kind words. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo Miño (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, my delegation would like to thank you and congratulate you most enthusiastically on your great leadership and the efforts made by you personally and by your team to achieve the consensus required by the Conference in order to fulfil its responsibilities towards the international community.

We came here this afternoon very optimistic and ready to join the consensus with the document that you have circulated after much consultation. However, new proposals have been put forward today and we believe, as many delegations have already expressed, that we need time to reflect on them and obtain the relevant instructions from our authorities.

We will continue to strive for consensus and, starting next week, will therefore work very hard with the presidency of the Ambassador of Brazil.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Ecuador for his kind words. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, first of all, I would like to welcome Ambassador Alicia Arango of Colombia and Ambassador Lucy Duncan of New Zealand to our Conference. From their résumés, we see that the two Ambassadors have much to bring to our work and we strongly hope that they will help us, because we need a lot of help.

(*spoke in English*)

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, I think that I can speak on behalf of all the other members of the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference in expressing our gratitude to our friend, the Permanent Representative of Belgium, Ambassador Pecsteen de Buytswerve. Mr. President, you and your team have deployed every possible effort in coordinating the group and the presidency to try to advance our work along a positive path. You have conducted us successfully along these feeble tightropes, but unfortunately we were not capable of following you to the safe port where you intended to bring us. We are still dancing on a tightrope.

I was hoping that the Chinese New Year would bring us good news, but we still have snow falling outside and a freezing meeting inside. We will take over the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament with some dismay, I must say. After a whole month of intense and patient negotiation, after several delegations had accepted delicate compromises for the sake of the continuation of the substantive work of this conference, and after we reached the edges of a satisfactory compromise, we suddenly arrive at a stalemate.

We take over the presidency from next week like a blind man in the middle of a gunfight. We simply do not know where to run to. What is expected of us here? We have the strong feeling that everything has been tried and that what remains for us is to go back to the situation we went through for the whole of last year. The prospect, unfortunately, is of wasting one more year among beautiful, radiant speeches.

Brazil will take over the presidency, asking ourselves three big questions: what are we here for, what will we do here during this whole year of 2021 and, like the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that flourished during 2020 and invaded this year of 2021, is our failure to act also to invade our meetings in 2021?

The Belgian presidency, in the context of the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session, did what it was possible to do to reach an agreement and help the work of this conference to take off. It was not the Belgian presidency that failed; it was all of us who failed. And if we altogether have not been able to reach an agreement, I really do not see how a Brazilian or any other presidency could succeed.

We take over the presidency, Mr. President, with the conviction that it will not be on the shoulders of the presidency alone to find a solution to our stalemate, but on the shoulders of each and every one of the delegations here present. And I must be very sincere here in saying that my country, holding the presidency, does not intend to bear the burden of transforming this conference once more into the mere sequence of speeches that it has become in 2020. If we arrive at the point of not being able to reach an agreement that would enable the Conference to do its real job, I intend not to convene any more sessions under the Brazilian presidency. What is expected from us here is not a series of beautiful speeches or unending accusations, but action in the pursuit of negotiation.

Having said that, I must add again, with the sincere hope that a way through will be found, that we intend to proceed with regular consultations within the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session, together with the last President of the 2020 session and the

first of the 2022 session, and with the regular coordinators during the Brazilian presidency. We are also keen to maintain the coordination with the group of six Presidents in order, if necessary, to further polish our documents and have them ready for approval at the earliest possible moment.

We plan to structure our work during our presidency by holding formal meetings, for formal interventions and general debate, on Tuesday 16 and Thursday 18 February, if necessary, following the usual pattern of Conference on Disarmament meetings. We will then, we hope, hold the high-level segment between 22 February and 26 February. In this regard, I reiterate the secretariat's request to delegations to forward the video-recorded statements of their high authorities. Then, after the high-level segment, so far I have only one meeting scheduled, at 3 p.m. on 9 March, and that, hopefully, will be the first meeting of subsidiary body 1.

Mr. President, I strongly hope to be able to count on your wise advice during the Brazilian presidency and once again I congratulate you warmly on all your efforts throughout these past six months. I thank also all the delegations that have expressed their support in advance for the Brazilian presidency. We will need it. I hope we can be equal to our responsibilities and I look forward to meeting all of you next Tuesday morning at our next plenary meeting.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador, for your very kind words. Once again, I wish you every success and, of course, you can count on my personal support.

With that, we have come to the end of our plenary meeting today. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.