

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Tuesday, 16 February 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Gonçalo de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão..... (Brazil)

The President: I call to order the 1558th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Dear delegates, before we proceed with our order of business today, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the new colleague who has assumed his responsibilities as representative of his Government to the Conference, distinguished Ambassador Mr. Ahmed Ihab Abdelahad Gamaleldin, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations Office and other international organizations at Geneva. Welcome, Ambassador.

Mr. Gamaleldin (Egypt): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Thank you very much for your kind words.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador. Again, welcome. I hope to hear you very often helping us go ahead with our work.

I would like now to propose an order of business for our meeting this morning. I suggest, as follows: first, we will consider requests by non-member States to participate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament at this 2021 session, then I will deliver my statement as President of the Conference. Thereafter, we intend to open the floor for the delegations for the continuation of work as we left it on Friday, 12 February.

I would like to invite you now to consider the new requests from non-member States to participate in the work of the Conference which were received by the afternoon of yesterday, Monday, 15 February 2021, and are contained in document CD/WP.631/Add.2. Any further requests from non-member States received after this date will be presented for your consideration and decisions at future plenary meetings.

I see that the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran wishes to take the floor.

Mr. Ali Abadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. Since this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor under your presidency, let me begin by congratulating you and Brazil for assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of Iran's cooperation.

With respect to the new requests by non-members to participate as observers in the Conference's 2021 session, as reflected in document CD/WP.631/Add.2, my delegation suggests that the Conference should consider the requests one by one, in accordance with its established practice. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran. If there are no objections, then, I will consider one by one the requests to participate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament contained in the document mentioned.

May I take it that the Conference decides, in accordance with its rule of procedure, to accept the request to participate in our work made by Burundi?

It was so decided.

The President: I will now proceed with the request from Latvia. May I take it that the Conference on Disarmament decides, in accordance with its rules of procedure, to accept this request from Latvia to participate in our work?

It was so decided.

The President: We will now decide on the request from Bahrain. May I take it that the Conference on Disarmament decides, in accordance with its rules of procedure, to accept the request by Bahrain to participate in our work? I recognize the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Ali Abadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation is not in a position to approve of this request for observer participation in the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament for the same reasons my delegation voiced with regard to requests by two other non-members – namely, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. We urge Bahrain to cease its destabilizing policies and actions in the region, in particular by ending its complicity in the war crimes in Yemen and positively contributing to regional peace and security. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I now recognize the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. Since this is the first time I take the floor under your presidency, let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and pledge my delegation's full cooperation as you carry out your duties.

It is unfortunate that Iran has chosen to once again block a United Nations Member State from observing the work of the Conference. I call on Iran to lift its objections to the requests of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain to observe the Conference. I also again call on Turkey to withdraw its veto of Cyprus's request to observe the Conference. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you very much, Ambassador, for the kind words for this presidency. We take note of your observations. I now give the floor to India. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Sharma (India): Thank you, Ambassador. I, too, would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of the full cooperation and support of India in the noble task that is ahead of you. I would also like to welcome our newest colleague, Ambassador of Egypt Ihab Gamaleldin, and welcome him to the Conference family here in Geneva.

Ambassador, while I have the floor, I would also like to support the request of Bahrain for observer status. India's position – that any United Nations Member State which submits a request to participate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament as an observer must be allowed to participate and that allowing such States to participate would help the work of this body tremendously – has been expressed very clearly in this body. We are thus with Bahrain in this request and hope that its request can be acceded to. Thank you.

The President: Thank you, India. I now recognize the Ambassador of the United Kingdom. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): At the outset, Mr. President, let me join others in congratulating you for assuming the presidency of this body and assuring you of my delegation's full support. I would also like to welcome our new colleague, the Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. President, like the Ambassadors of the United States and India before me, let me regret once again Iran's decision to block an application for observer status by a Member State of the United Nations. My delegation has made its position very clear before. We see no reason at all for any Member State of the United Nations to have its right to observe the proceedings of this Conference abrogated for purely bilateral political reasons. I once again urge Iran to lift the block on all these applications for observer status and indeed call on Turkey to lift its block on the application of Cyprus. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank you, Ambassador. I now give the floor to the delegation of Bangladesh.

Mr. Mahabubur Rahman (Bangladesh): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation in your efforts to advance the work of the Conference during your presidency.

Mr. President, despite the lack of progress in the substantial work of the Conference, we have been trying hard, relying on our mutual trust, principles and commitment to this body, to find a solution to long-standing issues. From this position, we always encourage and appreciate the participation of observers in its proceedings. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates participated in the work of the Conference on Disarmament earlier. Therefore, we would support having the Conference allow Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to continue participating in the Conference's work as observer States this year, too. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you very much to Bangladesh. I now give the floor to the Mexican delegate.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to join the other delegations in congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Given the proven commitment of Brazil to disarmament issues, your appointment is very welcome. I assure you that the Mexican delegation will give you its full support.

We also welcome the Ambassador of Egypt and look forward to working closely with his delegation on these issues. My delegation will not restate the arguments that we have previously put forward in response to rejections of requests for observer status made by other States Members of the United Nations. We would simply like to insist that, given the nature of the issues addressed here, which are universal, we must allow all those interested to accompany us in our task. We therefore call on the delegation of Iran to reconsider not only the request made by Bahrain but also those made by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. We also call on Turkey to reconsider its response to the request made by Cyprus.

Lastly, we would like to state for the record that the established practice of the Conference has been to deal with lists of requests for observer status as a whole rather than on a country-by-country basis. The latter practice, which is very recent, is a departure from the Conference's previous practice. We hope that, from next year onward, we will return to approving lists as a whole and that no request for observer status will be blocked. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much for your comments, Sir.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the delegate of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Good morning, distinguished colleagues. Good morning, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to join the previous speakers and congratulate you on becoming President, an office that is difficult but very important for the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to wish you success and patience in that role. You can count on the support of the Russian delegation in your efforts to bring our forum out of its stagnation and begin substantive work.

I would like to speak about approving requests for observer status. This is not the first time this year that our Conference has considered this issue or the first time it has faced a problem with approving requests for observer status. I would like to support the comment of my Mexican colleague, who rightly pointed out that the established practice of the Conference is to approve a list of requests, not to consider requests for each country separately. We hope that the Conference will finally manage to return to this long-standing practice and that the consideration of requests on an individual basis will be an exception for this session.

The position of the Russian Federation here is absolutely clear. We support the right of any United Nations Member State to receive observer status at the Conference. We believe that all Member States have an invaluable contribution to make to our forum. Any State is entitled to participate in meetings, express its opinion and contribute to discussions of the most vital issues in international security. Otherwise, if we depart from that principle, the work of our Conference will not be inclusive, will gradually turn into the activities of a kind of interest group and will not take into account the views of the United Nations Member States – of the broad international community, in other words. We therefore consider the approval of requests an important part of the organization of the Conference's work.

I would like to call on those States that, for various reasons, have opposed the approval of requests from States wishing to be observers at the Conference this year not to act based on the need to follow their own foreign policy but to focus on the goals of the Conference. Those goals require the views of all United Nations Member States to be taken into account in the consideration of the Conference agenda.

The President: Thank you, Sir, and thank you for the kind words and support for this presidency. I will now give the floor to the Ambassador of Canada.

Ms. Norton (Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I hope you can hear me. Like others, I would like to congratulate you on your presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to pass on a very warm welcome to our new Egyptian colleague. Like others, I would like to express my delegation's regret at the objection by the delegation of Iran with regard to the participation of Bahrain in this body. In the spirit of multilateralism, diverse views and perspectives in this forum are key and important, and thus we support the requests by all Member States to participate in the work of the Conference.

I would also like to echo our Mexican colleague's comment on considering the lists of countries that have submitted requests to observe the work of the Conference as a whole, not country by country. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Canada. I now give the floor to the delegate of Pakistan.

We are having some problems with Pakistan, so I will move to the next speaker, the Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. Gamaleldin (Egypt): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on assuming your responsibility as President of the Conference on Disarmament at this important juncture and to assure you of my delegation's full support. I would also like to express thanks for the kind words from my colleagues.

Mr. President, I would like to join the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Arab Group by the Ambassador of Morocco, and I want to say that it is unfortunate that in my first appearance at the Conference on Disarmament, the first issue that I must address is that a non-member State is denied the right to participate in the work of this Conference. This will only result in the politicization of the work of the Conference and will further aggravate tensions. Egypt's position on the participation of non-member States has been consistent over the years. This position is founded on our firm belief that the Conference on Disarmament is a technical body that is mandated with multilateral disarmament negotiations. We believe that the participation of non-member States contributes positively to the work of the Conference. I would like to reiterate Egypt's full support for the requests for participation submitted by Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Bahrain and to call upon Turkey and Iran to reverse their decisions.

With your permission, I will be making a general statement afterwards, when we move to the next agenda item. Thank you very much.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador, for the kind words for the presidency, and of course we are looking forward to your statement. I will now go back to the delegate of Pakistan.

Our problems connecting with the delegation of Pakistan have not been solved. I will thus give the floor to the delegate of Morocco. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Kabbaj (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I would like first to congratulate you on behalf of the Arab Group on assuming the presidency of the Conference and to assure you of our full support for the success of this session. On behalf of the Group and on behalf of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, I welcome the Ambassador of the sister Republic of Egypt. Secondly, on behalf of the Arab Group, the Kingdom of Morocco expresses its deep regret and surprise at the decision not to allow the Kingdom of Bahrain to participate as an observer in the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Prior to this, the requests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen were also rejected, which constitutes clear targeting of Group members. This position also constitutes unwanted politicization, as it does not serve the interests of our Conference and the important issues it addresses, and in general threatens the principle of multilateralism. The Arab Group is also of the view that all Member States of the United Nations have the right to participate in our meetings and calls on the Conference to reconsider all requests for participation and to find a solution that guarantees the right to participate for all States wishing to do, as we are convinced of the fundamental role played by these States, which should take part as full members. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you very much, Sir. I will now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands, to be followed by France and Germany.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President, and let me start by congratulating you on assuming the presidency. Above all, I wish you a lot of courage and perseverance in this job. Let me also congratulate our new Egyptian colleague for taking up his position as the representative of Egypt to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Let me echo the words of my colleagues and say that my country also regrets very much again one member State's opposition to allowing United Nations Member States to be admitted as observers in the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to ask whether Turkey will reconsider its opposition to allowing Cyprus to be an observer at the Conference. And I also agree with Mexico and Russia that there is no such thing as an established practice of deciding on observers one by one. Our accepted practice was to have a list of observers that was decided on as a whole. I thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands very much, including for his kind words for the presidency. If I may, I just will point out that this presidency presented the list as a whole to the floor of the Conference on Disarmament, and as we received an objection from one country to one of the countries on the list, I was obliged to consider the list country by country; otherwise, we would have had to block the whole list, which is not our intention. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Good morning, everybody. Good morning, Mr. President. Like the speakers before me, I congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you every success in the task ahead of you. I assure you that my delegation will do its utmost to make your presidency a success.

I extend a warm welcome to our Egyptian colleague, who is participating in the work of the Conference on Disarmament for the first time. I understand his dismay and astonishment. We are going to waste an hour on a debate that should not be a debate and on a question that is not really a question. We support the request for observer status submitted by Bahrain, just as we support requests from any countries that are not full members of the Conference on Disarmament to observe its work, because this is a basic principle of multilateralism and the very foundation of diplomacy. We deplore the position taken by Iran; it is contrary to the spirit of inclusiveness that has always governed the work of our forum and, as I said when we discussed this issue previously, I believe that Iran is persisting in its error and that its error should be condemned. We therefore call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to reconsider its position, just as we call on Turkey to withdraw its objection to the request made by Cyprus. Like other delegations that have taken the floor before me, I think that we should revert to the practice of blanket acceptance of requests for observer status made by States Members of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Ambassador, and thank you for all your good wishes regarding my presidency.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Germany, who will be followed by Austria and Australia.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. Let me, first of all, welcome you to the Chair and pledge Germany's full support. Furthermore, I would like to welcome our Egyptian colleague to the Conference on Disarmament. And it is regrettable that his first appearance is one at a meeting in which we started off with Iran's refusal to accept a United Nations Member State as an observer to the Conference on Disarmament. Like many others, my delegation also regrets that Iranian decision, calls upon Iran to reverse its position –including with regard to its refusal to accept other countries as observers – and hopes that we can get back to a situation where we adopt a list of applicants as a whole. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Austria.

Mr. Müller (Austria): Good morning, Mr. President. First of all, let me congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to pledge our fullest support to you and your team. We wish you patience and lots of success.

Secondly, I, too, would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new Egyptian Ambassador to the Conference and, like many others who spoke here before me, I regret – and even think it is a real pity – that after almost 45 minutes of discussion we are not yet touching upon disarmament in substance, as we should be doing here, but are talking about procedural aspects of our work. It is a pity that today it was Iran that blocked the request by Bahrain to observe the work of the Conference. I think that this is very regrettable, and we call upon Iran to reconsider its decision in the interest of multilateralism and inclusivity. And at this opportunity, I would also like to call on Turkey to reconsider its decision concerning Cyprus and the participation of Cyprus in the work of the Conference.

We think these decisions run counter to the principles of multilateralism and inclusivity. And, like many others, including, I think, Mexico, the Russian Federation, France and a few other countries, we should underline that there is no established practice of deciding on requests to observe the work of the Conference on a case-by-case basis. In the past, we decided on the entire list, and it was not very controversial. I think we should go back to this very useful practice of the past and not prevent United Nations Member States, which, in our understanding, have the right to participate as observers in the work of the Conference, from exercising this right. Thank you very much for your attention, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador for Austria. I now give the floor to the delegate of Australia.

Ms. Hill (Australia): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Let me start by congratulating you on assuming the presidency and assuring you of my delegation's full support. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new colleague, the Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. President, I would like to join the speakers before me and put my delegation's position on the issue of observers on record. Australia greatly values hearing a diversity of voices within multilateral forums, and to that end we regret that there have been objections to a number of requests for observership in the Conference on Disarmament this year, including in relation to Bahrain today. We hope that it will be possible for those United Nations Member States that have expressed their wish to participate as observers in the work of this body to do so, and we welcome efforts in support of that position. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Australia and I now give the floor to the delegate of Pakistan.

Mr. Omar (Pakistan): Thank you, Mr. President. Allow me to join others in congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation has outlined its position on the issue of participation by non-member States previously as well. In line with what we have stated previously on the matter, Pakistan supports the request for participation in the Conference's work by Bahrain. We have also supported previous requests by Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates and we would also continue to support requests by others that may make such requests in the future. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank you very much, Sir, and now give the floor to the delegate of Norway.

Mr. Rydning (Norway): Good morning, Mr. President, and thank you for giving me the floor. Let me congratulate you first for assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and for your service to the Conference. You of course have Norway's full support.

It is always a question for us whether or not to speak out every time this regrettable denial of observership happens; we have precious little time as it is in this virtual format of ours, but once in a while we feel compelled, and the reason that we find ourselves in this situation – having used almost half the morning meeting on this procedural issue – is not on

us. I would thus like to reiterate the Norwegian position, which, like that of all delegates who have spoken this morning after the delegate of Iran, is that all United Nations Member States that wish to become observers of the Conference should be allowed to. A political disagreement is not an argument to block participation in crucial multilateral processes like this one, so we call on Iran to reverse its position on the observership of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. We also call on Turkey to reverse its position on Cyprus. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of Norway. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President. On behalf of the Chinese delegation, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the rotating presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and, like other colleagues, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Ambassador of Egypt. With regard to the issues we are now discussing, China has always believed that every Member State of the United Nations should have the opportunity to participate in the work of the Conference. Therefore, we welcome all applications from States to participate as observers and to join in the work of the Conference this year.

Mr. President, in recent years, the work of the Conference has been seriously affected by politicization. The question of how to extricate the Conference from the shadow of the past few years calls for new efforts on the part of all parties. The problems facing us also demonstrate that the Conference's work is closely related to the security situation at the international and regional levels. In any event, the very meaning of multilateralism is that international and regional peace and security must be promoted through multilateral mechanisms, including the Conference. We hope that the President will maintain consultations with all the parties concerned and work to resolve the question of participation by observers for the countries concerned. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China. I now give the floor to the delegate of Turkey.

Mr. Işılak (Turkey): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of Turkey's full support and cooperation in your endeavours to enhance the work of the Conference. We understand that we have to reiterate the reasoning behind our non-approval of a certain request for observer status in the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President, I would like to remind you that Turkey does not recognize the Greek Cypriot Administration, which does not represent the entire island. Although Turkey has had concerns with one entity's request, it had never raised a blanket objection or chosen to block a country on the list from participating as an observer of Conference activities until last year. Instead, we had registered our position with a letter. This course of action was due to the utmost importance that Turkey attached to not spoiling or politicizing the positive atmosphere of the Conference. Once again, we would like to emphasize the fact that we did not change this practice. We are ready to maintain our positive stance, return to the old practice and offer a blanket acceptance of the list of requests to observe the work of the Conference and register our position afterwards with a letter. We are still waiting for the members to acknowledge our constructive approach this year. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of Turkey very much.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I now give the floor to the delegate of Chile.

(*spoke in English*)

We have some problems connecting with the delegate of Chile. I give the floor to the next speaker on the list, the delegate of South Africa.

Mr. September (South Africa): Thank you, Mr. President. Good morning, colleagues. Let me start, Mr. President, by congratulating you on taking up the position as President of the Conference on Disarmament. South Africa wishes you every success in your tenure. You

can be assured of South Africa's continued support for getting the Conference to resume its work and to live up to its mandate. On behalf of South Africa, I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the Ambassador of Egypt.

With regard to the matter at hand, South Africa, as a matter of principle, supports all requests by States for observer status in the Conference. We therefore repeat our call for Iran and Turkey to reconsider all the requests that were submitted for observer status. The position of the South African delegation is that all United Nations Member States have the right to participate in our meetings. We would like to urge all members of the Conference on Disarmament to refrain from preventing any State Member of the United Nations from participating in the Conference in the spirit of multilateralism, in a quest for a better world for all. I thank you.

The President: I thank you very much for the kind words for this presidency and give the floor to the delegate of Nigeria.

Mr. Ikwe (Nigeria): Thank you, Mr. President. Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor under your presidency, let me start by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assuring you of Nigeria's support as you carry out the enormous task of presiding over the Conference. My delegation also welcomes the Ambassador of Egypt to the Conference and wishes him a successful tenure in Geneva.

My delegation aligns itself with the position expressed by many other delegations in respect of the request by non-members to participate in the Conference. In this connection, my delegation urges Iran and Turkey to reconsider their position on the requests by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Cyprus, as well as Bahrain, to participate in the work of the Conference. My delegation also believes that we should revert to the system of comprehensive approvals, as a whole, of requests by non-members of the Conference, as recalled by Mexico and Russia. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your attention.

The President: I thank the delegate of Nigeria and now give the floor to the Ambassador of Switzerland.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, first of all, allow me to warmly congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of my delegation's full support in the performance of your duties. I would also like to welcome the Ambassador of Egypt to the Conference.

Mr. President, we, too, deplore the fact that, once again, a State wishing to participate in our work as an observer has encountered an objection to its request, as happened in other cases earlier in the session. As I have already pointed out, these developments are worrying because they challenge the very principles of multilateralism, which require that all States Members of the United Nations be allowed to express their views. These developments are also worrying for the Conference on Disarmament and its credibility. We therefore invite those members of the Conference on Disarmament that have objected to requests for observer status to reconsider their position and we call on the Conference to swiftly resolve this problem. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of Switzerland.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I now give the floor to the representative of Chile.

Mr. Plaza Gentina (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. As this is the first time that my delegation has taken the floor, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and assure you of my delegation's support. We also welcome the new Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. President, in line with our previous statements in support of multilateralism and inclusiveness, my delegation respectfully requests that the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran reconsider the negative stance that it has adopted today. Thank you.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of Chile.

(spoke in English)

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

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me begin by congratulating you on your assumption as President of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of my delegation's full support for and cooperation with your endeavours to make progress in our work. I also join other colleagues in welcoming the new Ambassador of Egypt to this body.

Regarding observer status, I want to reiterate that we believe that inclusiveness among United Nations Member States 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. I thank you very much.

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

Ms. Marchand (Belgium): Thank you, Mr. President. First, let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation wishes you every success in your endeavours and assures you of its full support. I would also like to express a warm welcome to the Ambassador of Egypt to the Conference.

Mr. President, like many delegations before me, my delegation regrets the rejection of the request for observership by Bahrain. The swift rejection of an observer State this year constitutes a violation of the spirit of multilateralism and runs counter to the principle of inclusiveness. My delegation supports participation of all United Nations Member States in the work of the Conference and therefore calls on Turkey and Iran to reconsider their positions and allow Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Bahrain to participate in our work. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the delegate of Belgium very much and now give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Thank you very much, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. Since this is my first time taking the floor under your presidency, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of this very important responsibility at this very difficult juncture. I would also like to express my heartfelt welcome to the new Ambassador of Egypt. I look forward to cooperating closely with him.

With regard to observership, Japan is always in favour of a wider range of observers; since the Conference on Disarmament is aiming at an instrument of a universal value and universal nature, having a wider range of United Nations Member States as observers would do much to enrich our discussions. Japan is therefore always willing to accept requests to observe the work of the Conference made by United Nations Member States. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan. I have no more speakers on my list. I wonder if there are still any other delegations that would like to take the floor on this subject. I recognize the Ambassador of the United States of America. Ambassador, you have the floor.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank you, Mr. President – my apologies for taking the floor again. Given all that we have heard this morning, all the concerns expressed about a number of United Nations Member States' not being able to observe the Conference on Disarmament, my delegation would like to make a request that you and your team, if you are so inclined, use your good offices to engage with Iran and Turkey to see if we can come to some kind of a solution. The fact that Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, as well as Cyprus, cannot participate as observers during this year's session is quite troubling, so, again, my delegation and I request that you use your good offices to see if you can, offline, work out some kind of agreement. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much, Ambassador. I recognize the Ambassador of the Netherlands. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President. I was just taking the floor to support the proposal made by my American colleague, if indeed you are willing to use your

good offices. I know your predecessor also tried to come up with a solution. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Netherlands. I do not see any other speaker on my list.

I think that one of the hard jobs of the presidency is to try to find a way out of stalemates. What we have, however, is not really a stalemate, as our norms are clear: if there is an objection and no consensus, there is no possibility of moving forward. I nonetheless prefer to think that we could try to reach a consensus on the issue, so with that hope in mind, and in the hope of being able to disarm spirits in our Conference on Disarmament and, of course, without entering into the reasons for the positions Iran and Turkey have assumed now, I propose that the two countries take the time to reconsider, at least for one session, and hear their capitals again to see if they cannot agree to what seems to be a general consensus on this issue in the Conference on Disarmament.

It should also be borne in mind that the mere participation of any country as an observer in no way interferes with the work of the Conference. They will not be working at the Conference – they will only be observing our work. I wonder, then, if Iran and Turkey could give us one or two days to consult their capitals and see if they can make an effort to join the consensus on this matter. If so, I will hold this request from the Kingdom of Bahrain in abeyance and move to the next item on our agenda.

I do not see any requests for the floor, so I assume that we can keep this item open and reconsider it on Thursday, 18 February. Meanwhile, we will see what can be done on this matter. Let us, then, move to the next item on our agenda, which is the statement from this presidency on the opening of this first plenary meeting under the presidency of Brazil.

Dear colleagues, at the outset, let me express my deepest gratitude – and I think the gratitude of us all – to Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve, Permanent Representative of Belgium. Thank you, Ambassador, for all your efforts in coordinating the meetings of group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference and for discharging your duties as President with such diligence and elegance. We praise you and your team's labour, in particular that of Mr. Neijens and Ms. Marchand, who were tireless in searching for ways to break the stalemate, looking for a constructive consensus so that our substantive work could really begin.

Allow me also to express gratitude to the former Ambassador of Algeria, Rachid Belbaki, for his diplomatic acumen in advancing last year the core of the proposed package, which has been so much appreciated in recent days.

Finally, I believe that general gratitude must also be expressed to all delegates here who worked hard to arrive at a delicate balance in order to achieve some positive decisions to give our work a more solid foundation. Many of you were capable of showing an extraordinary capacity to adjust your positions and to agree on tenuous language for the sake of the resumption of work by this Conference. Unfortunately, dear colleagues, all that did not manage to move us out of stagnation. And the burden for this presidency seems to be a heavy one, as I said last Friday – a heavy one, because I have the impression that almost everything that could be done to advance our work was done, and still we could not advance. But as advancing our work is a responsibility we all share, I dare to put here the main question to this floor. Do we really want this Conference to take off or do we prefer to sit here and listen to beautiful speeches and sour accusations all day long?

I prefer to believe – and I sincerely hope – that those constructive capacities displayed by all in recent weeks will continue to prosper in the coming days and that we at the Conference on Disarmament will be capable at the end of the day of presenting to the world solid progress in this fundamental and wide field of disarmament. Indeed, the moment is an optimistic one for the matter we deal with here, as we are currently witnessing the much-desired renewal of the New START, celebrating the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and preparing for the review conferences of the parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Biological Weapons Convention, just to mention a few important events related to disarmament.

It is thus with this hope that I initiate this presidency, starting from the delicate point to which the representative of Belgium was able to lead us on Friday, 12 February. Having said that, I must add again, with the sincere hope that the way through will be found, that the group of the session's six Presidents intends to proceed with the regular consultations within the group and with the regional coordinators during the Brazilian presidency. We are also keen to maintain the coordination within the group of the six Presidents in order, if necessary, to further polish our documents and have them ready for adoption at the earliest possible moment.

We plan to structure our work during our presidency in the following manner: our proposal is to hold formal Conference meetings on Tuesdays, as usual, and on Thursdays if necessary. If deemed necessary, we will also hold informal, open-ended consultations to try to achieve what could not be achieved during the usual meetings. Following this first week, it is hoped that the high-level segment will be held between 22 and 26 February. In this regard, I reiterate the secretariat's requests to delegations to forward video-recorded statements from their high authorities – I will give the floor later to the secretariat for more information in that connection. After the high-level segment, the organization of our work will depend on what we have achieved until then and may include, at 3 p.m. on 9 March, the first meeting of subsidiary body 1.

As I said, last Friday we considered two documents – some proposals for minor amendments were made by some delegations that same Friday, whereas other delegations were unable to give those documents their full consideration. We were unable to receive instructions from capitals due to local holidays, which, by the way, I fully understand, as today in Brazil we are in the middle of carnival, a celebration that lasts at least four days and brings the whole country to a standstill. And even though the COVID-19 restrictions have caused the festivities to be rather restrained this year, I, too, am having difficulty obtaining responses from my capital.

Therefore, to build on what we have done and to restart to our work, I go back to the documents circulated on Thursday, 11 February, and put another question to the Conference. Are we ready to accept the proposed decisions contained in documents CD/WP.633/Rev.1 and CD/WP.634/Rev.1? You have the floor.

I recognize the Ambassador of Egypt.

Mr. Gamaleldin (Egypt): Allow me once again to congratulate you on your assumption of your responsibility as President of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to thank all ambassadors and colleagues for their kind words and to express my delegation's appreciation for the efforts of the outgoing President of the Conference, the Ambassador of Belgium. I would like to extend my words of appreciation to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and the Conference secretariat, who continue to support the work of the Conference during such difficult times. I would like to reaffirm Egypt's continued support for the Conference's presidency in its constructive efforts to adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament and to express my country's aspiration for the 2021 session to lead to the restoration of the effective role of the Conference, which has long been pivotal in negotiating international treaties and agreements in the field of disarmament.

I would like to begin my statement with a personal note, and that is that while it is indeed an honour for me to be back at this forum after several years, it is regrettable that the impasse in the Conference on Disarmament persists.

Mr. President, last year marked several important milestones for multilateral diplomacy, from the General Assembly's seventh-fifth anniversary to the fiftieth anniversary of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Sadly, the unprecedented global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a horrific toll on individuals, communities and societies and prevented several disarmament forums from performing their work. This pandemic has exposed how fragile the international community can be, how interdependent we are and, most importantly, how irrational it is to continue directing invaluable resources to nuclear arsenals and arms races in several strategic domains.

The beginning of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament is taking place in an extremely fragile, if not deteriorating, global security environment in which progress on disarmament in all its aspects is more urgent than ever. We are faced with heightened and renewed tensions among States, challenges to existing norms and technological advances that provide opportunities, challenges and risks. Addressing them all through building on the existing architecture and the development of new disarmament measures should be the key focus of the 2021 session.

Egypt believes that the Conference on Disarmament is at the centre of the disarmament machinery. It is the single multilateral disarmament body, with a distinct mandate of negotiating legally binding disarmament instruments. It should be reinvigorated and enabled to fulfil its role as envisaged in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. The prolonged stalemate of the Conference on Disarmament should not persist and certainly should not restrain us from exerting our utmost efforts to achieve a substantive breakthrough this year.

Mr. President, let me highlight, in this connection, Egypt's view on the top priorities of the work of the Conference:

First, nuclear disarmament, in implementation of article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, remains the foremost priority. In this regard, Egypt attaches the utmost importance to the negotiation in the Conference of a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention which should ultimately aim to achieve the complete and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific time frame and under effective international verification and control. Nuclear-weapon States bear a special responsibility to implement their obligations on nuclear disarmament and to allow the commencement of negotiations without further delay.

Earlier this year, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force. As you all are aware, Egypt actively participated in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Treaty and constructively contributed to the drafting of its text, in line with its long-standing, principled position on nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, the process leading to this achievement was concluded outside the Conference on Disarmament. Nevertheless, efforts to pursue this endeavour further should be conducted at the Conference by negotiating a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention.

Second, we believe that the Conference should start negotiations on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable legally binding instrument banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. The prospective instrument should fulfil both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. This can never be properly done if fissile material stocks are excluded from its scope. An instrument that only bans future production is hardly the objective, since it detracts from and subverts the disarmament objective.

Third, we firmly believe that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only guarantee against their use or threat of use. Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, there persists an urgent need to conclude a universal, unconditional, irrevocable legally binding instrument for effectively assuring non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under all circumstances.

Fourth, special attention should be accorded to the development and strengthening of the existing legal regime for promoting and maintaining outer space for peaceful activities and preserving its nature as a common heritage of humankind. The essential role of outer space technologies in all human activities and the extreme vulnerability of the outer space environment make it necessary to act now to prevent outer space from turning into a domain for conflict and arms races. For years, Egypt, alternating with Sri Lanka, has been presenting a resolution to the General Assembly on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. A legally binding instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space would be significant, especially taking into consideration the alarming trends in the possible weaponization of outer space and the development by several States of anti-satellite capabilities.

Mr. President, Egypt looks forward to the success of the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In this vein, I would like to draw your attention to the statement Egypt issued jointly with 16 like-minded States in May 2020, fifty years after the entry into force of the Treaty. Egypt reiterates that failure to universalize the Treaty, together with the decades-long stalemate in the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East, is significantly eroding the credibility and sustainability of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and multilateral norms.

Egypt emphasizes that the success of the Treaty is inextricably linked to the adoption by the Review Conference of a balanced outcome document that reaffirms past commitments and provides for timely implementation, especially with regard to the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, a cornerstone of the indefinite extension of the Treaty.

On a brighter note, Egypt wishes to highlight the successful first session of the United Nations Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, held in 2019 under the presidency of Jordan, and the adoption of a forward-looking political declaration and final report.

Egypt believes that this consensus-based process could significantly contribute to strengthening the international nuclear disarmament regime and accelerate reaching a nuclear-weapon-free-world. We look forward to the support of the international community for this process, as its participants prepare for its second session, to be held under the presidency of Kuwait.

Mr. President, Egypt values your commitment to starting substantive work at the Conference on Disarmament. For its part, Egypt will strive through this year's session to work constructively with you and all members towards the achievement of the objectives of the Conference on Disarmament, which are neither impossible to attain nor hindered by any obstacles that cannot be overcome. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank you very much, Ambassador. The very clear and objective way in which you presented the positions of your country on the subjects of the Conference on Disarmament is a reflection of what will certainly be your rich and positive contributions to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan, to be followed by Cuba.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Good morning, Mr. President. Thank you for convening this meeting. On behalf of my delegation, I congratulate you on assuming the year's second presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our full cooperation. We also welcome very warmly the Ambassador of Egypt.

We appreciate the opportunity to share views on options for taking forward the draft proposal presented by Belgium last week. Let me briefly recap the approach and its rationale vis-à-vis the current Conference session, whether in plenary meetings or bilaterally.

Mr. President, as you will recall, many member States continue to stress the importance of the comprehensive and balanced work of the Conference. We note that through our collective efforts we have moved in the right direction even if we are yet to fully realize it. My delegation has also continued to underscore the need to address the root causes of the malaise that afflicts the Conference, especially the negative external developments.

On our part, my delegation has demonstrated maximum flexibility and engaged constructively with the Conference President and other delegations. Even though the draft proposals presented last Wednesday and Friday did not fully meet our expectations, we were ready to join consensus on both occasions and are prepared to support them even now.

We are mindful that the proposal in its current form remains imperfect. It does not, as I said, fully meet the expectations of members of the Conference; however, it has the potential to put the Conference back to substantive work. It also probably remains the best that is possible under the circumstances.

While we may all have our views and priorities on different parts of the current proposal, it is very clear that there is no agreement on some of the priorities that delegations

have advanced. We have expressed our reservation on the language of operative paragraph 3 previously and have demonstrated maximum flexibility to go along with the proposal as it was formulated. As we have stated before, further tinkering with operative paragraph 3 is more likely to further accentuate divisions than to bring us closer to an agreement. We have exercised restraint and have not proposed new or additional language in operative paragraphs. We are aware of the existing complexities and do not wish to complicate matters further.

It is essential for our approach to remain anchored in realism, take full account of the externalities and be centred on a comprehensive and balanced mandate for all items on the Conference agenda. It is important for the Conference not to regress but to move forward. It is also imperative to address the legitimate concerns of all delegations, especially with regard to their national security.

Let me again assure you of my delegation's support. We will engage constructively and in line with the parameters I have outlined above. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan. I hope every delegation has the same spirit of cooperation and I now give the floor to the delegate of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. As this is the first time that our delegation has taken the floor, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our full support as you strive to fulfil the mandate of this august body. Allow me also to congratulate and welcome the new Ambassador of Egypt, who is sure to make a significant contribution to our work.

Although I have been attending the meetings of the Conference for only a short time, I recall that, before the emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), when in-person meetings were still held, the Presidents, in what was a good practice, moved from formal plenary meetings to informal ones after the formal opening statements had been made. The only consequence of this was that the official recording of the meeting was stopped and we continued in the same format, which facilitated direct exchanges between the delegations. I wonder whether, under your presidency, and in this online format, it might be possible to resume this good practice. We know that it is very difficult to negotiate on online platforms. In fact, our delegation does not support this practice, although we participate in it as a sign of our constructive engagement with the process. However, we believe that it is worse to engage in a sterile exercise whereby a President puts a document on the table, we all say what we think, nobody listens to anyone else, we negotiate absolutely nothing and we move on to the next meeting or press on with the current one if we wish to see whether one delegation or another has blocked the consensus or shown flexibility.

I believe that the most significant progress made during the past presidency resulted from the consultation organized by the Ambassador of Belgium, which was a sincere exercise in negotiating a consensus document despite the fact that it was by invitation only and there was no interpretation service. I believe that it was during his presidency that the most significant progress was made towards a solution, for which we congratulate the outgoing President.

Last Friday, the Russian delegation proposed some amendments to the texts on the table. Some delegations directly supported these proposals, while others made similar proposals that were based on the proposals made by the Russian delegation. As it was an official meeting, however, some delegations were forced to say that they needed to ask their capitals for guidance.

In any case, I have not heard any delegation say that any of the proposals made by the Russian delegation, or by other colleagues, constituted a red line for any delegation. I understand that this is a holiday period for some countries. However, we are not on holiday; we are gathered here under your presidency, and I believe that we must be committed to our work. I would like to suggest that we resume the practice of moving to an informal format in which the delegations can sincerely express their views and thereby facilitate your work so that you can present us with new versions of the documents. Given that the Conference's mandate is a very serious one, we must begin genuine negotiations rather than simply making

political statements that distance us from our mandate instead of helping us to fulfil it. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the representative of Cuba. I believe that we are thinking along the same lines, as I voiced similar views in my introductory speech. The delegate of Egypt took the floor, as he was participating in the Conference for the first time, and I think it is accepted practice to give the floor to newcomers so that they may outline their general positions.

As far as our document is concerned, last Friday we had a formal meeting that reached an impasse. As I said in my statement, the impasse arose because some amendments were put forward that had not been discussed and some countries requested time to consult their capitals. In initiating this debate on the two documents, my intention was to determine whether the amendments proposed on Friday have been well received or not and to find out, now that at least two working days have passed, whether the countries that requested time for a reply from their capitals have any comments to make that would help us to move forward with our work here.

This formal plenary meeting of the Conference has two purposes: to find out where we stand – that is, whether we wish to work on the document discussed on Friday, in its current form, or whether we would like to discuss a version that incorporates the amendments submitted by Russia and any other comments that might be made today by the countries that have not yet commented on it.

Once that is decided, we can decide, as I also said in my introductory statement, to have an informal meeting to see how we can deal informally with any other comments that may be made by the delegates who have asked for time. That is how I intend to proceed. Many thanks to the delegate of Cuba.

(*spoke in English*)

I give the floor now to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President. I have already welcomed our new Egyptian colleague, but I must say of his intervention that I am quite impressed with his knowledge. From day one, he is already part of our club.

Let me thank your predecessor, Mr. President, for all the hard work he, his whole team and the group of the year's six Presidents have done. You yourself, Mr. President, spoke very wise words about the current political climate and gave several examples of where we stand and the possibility of reaching an agreement in this new climate. Let me add one other element, the extension of the New START, which also shows that if there is a will, we can reach this. And of course, this has to do with a new Administration in Washington.

Mr. President, we came on Friday to the meeting thinking we had reached an agreement, *ad referendum*, under the leadership of Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve, but last-minute proposals prevented it. I would say, then, that since Friday all bets are off. We are in a new situation. My delegation can certainly support your proposal to work on a revised proposal.

Let me also echo the intervention of Pakistan. Pakistan made a very constructive intervention in which the Ambassador mentioned that he could agree with the proposals which were on the table on Friday and on which we had an agreement, *ad referendum*. He also mentioned that his delegation had shown restraint. I think this is an example for all of us: we have to show some restraint and go back to the proposal which was put on the table by Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve and on which, subject to the finalization of details, we had managed to reach an agreement.

I see two ways forward, Mr. President: we can go back to 2018, in which we managed to reach consensus both on the decision to establish the subsidiary bodies and on written agreements on the four reports we produced. The basis of our report and the basis of our decision should thus be – and there you mentioned the revised draft decision on the implementation of the programme of work – built along the same lines and with the same formulation as those agreed upon in 2018.

If this is not possible, then we come to the solution which the Belgian Ambassador proposed. I think that is the way to reach a consensus. The alternative, which is the prerogative of the President and can be dealt with by the group of the six Presidents, is to organize substantive discussions and even have even a coordinator to deal with this on the different agenda items. It is not the preferred way for my delegation – the preferred way for my delegation is to re-establish the subsidiary bodies and work on the basis of what we agreed upon and achieved in 2018. We reached a consensus at that time, and I see no reason whatsoever for us not to be able to build on that success and the progress we made in 2018.

So, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for your proposal to work on the revised draft decision, which can certainly meet the approval of my delegation. I thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Netherlands very much for such constructive observations and I give the floor to the delegate of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have listened carefully to what was said by the previous speakers. The statement by my Dutch colleague was rather curious. I would like to say that his version of the consultations held on Thursday and Friday does not fully reflect the reality.

Yes, consultations were held on Thursday, and the Russian delegation did make a number of proposals, which it then put to all the delegations on Friday. As for approving the two documents *ad referendum*, that is not quite how it went. The Russian delegation and a few others called for a timeout and said that they needed to consult their capitals on the proposals that had been discussed on Thursday. Only then could the delegations give their opinion on the proposed wording. Therefore, it is not right or accurate to say that the documents were fully approved *ad referendum* on Thursday. My distinguished colleague from the Netherlands knows that very well. He is simply engaging in wishful thinking.

Moreover, the Russian delegation acted absolutely openly and transparently. We informed the Belgian presidency in advance of the instructions we received from Moscow regarding the fact that we had new proposals for the documents that had been circulated, and it was suggested that we make those proposals during the meeting, which we did. We did that not in order to block the adoption of the document but in the expectation that our proposals would be carefully considered and discussed during the plenary meeting. Unfortunately, no such discussion ensued. That is surprising, because if the proposals had been put forward by, say, the delegation of the Netherlands, I am sure that most European members of the Conference on Disarmament would have actively supported and discussed them. I do not understand the reason for such disrespect for the position of the Russian Federation.

By the way, I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, who took a reasonable position, saying that, since no objections had been raised to the Russian amendments, they merited careful consideration and continued discussion. In my opinion, that is a reasonable and sensible position. Why not take such a position?

We are not refusing to work on turning the documents circulated by the Belgian presidency into the basis of a consensus acceptable to all. On the contrary, we are in favour of that, in favour of open dialogue and open discussion, but, unfortunately, for some reason, certain States either are afraid of discussion or are refusing for whatever reason to engage in it.

For example, I am surprised that the Russian proposal to change just one preposition in the title of the second document was met with opposition, even though the proposal followed on logically from the change to the title of the first document. Why do the delegations not even want to discuss that simple, logical and surface-level proposal? I think the situation demands an analysis from the standpoint of what it is currently happening at the Conference.

We are not proposing to block the adoption of the document – we are proposing amendments to it. We are open to dialogue, we are open to discussion, we are open to compromise. However, certain States are assuming that compromise is impossible because new amendments have been put forward. Really? Did no one ever propose amendments before? I am simply astounded. Our delegation is disappointed by what happened on Friday and is happening now.

Let us hold consultations. If States do not want to take part in formal consultations, let us hold informal ones. It is astonishing, but I do not see a willingness even to discuss our proposal! What is going on? Please explain to me, Mr. President. Let the Dutch Ambassador explain to me what is going on and why he does not want to discuss the Russian proposals, such as the change of preposition in the title of the second document. If that is such a political issue for the Dutch, I am sorry, but then what in the world are we talking about? What documents can we possibly discuss and what substantive work can we possibly begin? It is completely preposterous. Words fail me here, but what is happening now, what we are seeing at the Conference, does not fit at all into our real, normal, productive, constructive and open work.

Mr. President, I am sorry for my emotional statement, but I think it is fair and merits consideration, as do the Russian amendments to the two documents, which we explained on Friday.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation. I think that I need to reiterate the understanding of this Chair. This document is a starting point. I understand that some of the proposals that were made by the delegation of the Russian Federation on Thursday were reflected here and some, mostly those made on Friday, were not. Why I do not know, but my intention, as I said before, is to start from this document and then accept, receive and discuss any amendment that may be proposed by member States, because we have to achieve a consensus on this. And we will achieve a consensus only if we discuss different positions, so we should perhaps call an informal open-ended meeting this afternoon to add to this paper the amendments proposed by the Russian Federation, discuss them and see where we can go and where we can arrive.

I would also like to hear now whether some of the delegations that said last Thursday and Friday they had problems consulting their capitals have received answers from their capitals. If they prefer, we can ask this question in the informal meeting so that they can answer it informally if they are more comfortable with that.

As I hear nobody, I have a list of three speakers here before me. I give the floor to the delegate of Mexico, to be followed by France and the Syrian Arab Republic. Mexico, you have the floor.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. My delegation would first like to acknowledge the diligent and excellent work done by Ambassador Pecsteen and his team, which has enabled the Conference on Disarmament to make progress. My delegation would like to thank you for reconvening us to try to resolve the outstanding issues related to the draft decisions circulated by the Belgian delegation on behalf of the six Presidents of the Conference for this session.

We acknowledge the six Presidents' determination to continue pushing for a document that is acceptable to all delegations. We had expressed our willingness to accept the initial versions of documents CD/WP.633 and CD/WP.634 even though they did not meet all our expectations. Unfortunately, the initial revised versions have made it more complicated for us to join the consensus.

We understand that there are differing views in the Conference on the success of the work carried out in 2018 to establish the subsidiary bodies. No one should have been surprised when the Mexican delegation clearly stated that, in its view, this was a deliberative exercise that fell far short of the objectives set out in the decision contained in document CD/2119. The quality and quantity of the information provided in the reports of the subsidiary bodies, contained in documents CD/2138, CD/2139, CD/2140 and CD/2141, are variable. These reports are mainly descriptive in that they reflect the divergence of views but do not generally show any progress being made towards fulfilling the mandate to consider effective measures, including legal instruments for negotiation.

That is why, in all subsequent attempts to negotiate programmes of work or decisions, whether under the presidencies of Ukraine or the United Kingdom, or even through the joint efforts of the six Presidents for the 2020 session, serious efforts were made to refine the mandate for each exercise undertaken to advance the work of the Conference and progress beyond the 2018 process, even if these mandates do not yet fully correspond to the

negotiating mandate of this Conference. Whatever process we decide to pursue, my delegation hopes that it is not seen merely as a continuation of the 2018 exercise, as we believe that all the delegations have made a considerable effort to go beyond the aims and objectives of that exercise.

Mr. President, yesterday my delegation approached your delegation to suggest making some minor changes to the Rev.1 documents. We believe that these changes will put us on a new path that will not institutionalize the 2018 exercise but allow us to advance towards fulfilling the Conference's mandate.

In a spirit of transparency, I would like to describe these brief changes to all the delegations. We are proposing only one change to document CD/WP.633/Rev.1. Given that preambular paragraphs 3 and 6 convey similar ideas and are therefore repetitive, we propose to retain only paragraph 3, with a small addition that would be in line with the Conference's previous efforts to overcome the deadlock in its work – that is, an explicit statement that all the Conference's substantive work should comply with the mandate set out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

The delegation of Mexico would prefer it if document CD/WP.634/Rev.1 contained no specific reference to the 2018 subsidiary bodies. Firstly, as this is purely a decision on implementation, we see no need to include any preambular paragraph that would in some way qualify or reinterpret the decision contained in document CD/WP.633/Rev.1. Document CD/2126 contained no preambular paragraph to provide context, and we do not believe that this decision requires one either.

With regard to the language used in the timetable governing the work of the subsidiary bodies, while our preference would be to revert to the language of the decision contained in document CD/2126, we understand that it has not been possible to reach a consensus. We believe that the current language is too limiting and gives undue weight to the reports of the 2018 subsidiary bodies. As my delegation mentioned last Friday, this language makes no sense in relation to subsidiary body 4. In this regard, my delegation would prefer a more generic statement to the effect that the work will broadly take into account all the discussions and documents on each of the agenda items. The sentences that say that this work should be based on the reports contained in documents CD/2138, CD/2139, CD/2140 and CD/2141 should be deleted.

I hope that these comments are helpful. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the delegate of Mexico for his very objective comments.

I still have four countries on the list of speakers, and we have only 5 or 10 minutes remaining. I propose that we hold an informal meeting from 3 to 5 p.m. this afternoon to further consider the proposals that have been made, others that may be made and, we hope, the comments of the countries that were waiting to hear from their capitals last week.

I do not know if it will be possible, but I am also going to ask the secretariat to reflect some of these proposals in the document. If not, at the start of the meeting we will make a list of the proposals for amendments to this document that we have received so far so that we can work on them, if you wish.

The four speakers on the list are the delegates of France, Germany, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United States of America. As we have 10 minutes, I would be grateful if you divided the time among yourselves so that we can hear from all of you. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I will try to be brief, as you have requested. Firstly, my delegation is fully prepared to work on the basis of the documents that were discussed on Friday – namely, documents CD/WP.633/Rev.1 and CD/WP.634/Rev.1. We have no problem with working on that basis. However, we believe, as the representative of Pakistan has rightly said, that these two documents do not fully meet the expectations of the members of the Conference on Disarmament and that there is room for improvement, even though my own delegation was ready to join the consensus on these documents on Friday.

Briefly, I would also like to support my Dutch colleague's interpretation of what happened last week. We believe that an agreement *ad referendum* was reached on Thursday. We are all entitled to our own recollections of the past, but when they differ to this extent, it becomes problematic. It is becoming problematic that, more and more often, not only in the Conference on Disarmament but also in other forums, when an agreement is reached *ad referendum* or even formally adopted, some delegations go back on that agreement. This is becoming a serious procedural problem.

With regard to the statement by the Russian delegation, I would like to reassure my Russian colleague, whose emotion was evident, that my delegation is by no means refusing to discuss the amendments proposed by his delegation. The problem is that the proposals were made orally on Friday and that they are substantive rather than purely technical. Russia is disappointed that we have not taken them into account, but that is because they have not been circulated in writing to all the delegations. And here I see something of a contradiction: Russia is very attached to its proposed amendments but has not circulated them in writing so that they can be examined properly, both here in Geneva and in our respective capitals, and that is a problem. I imagine that if we were to do the same, the Russian delegation would not be very happy about not being able to send proposed amendments to Moscow in writing. I think that it would feel the same frustration and would not hold back from expressing it.

To come back to your suggestion, Mr. President, I am, of course, prepared to have an informal discussion this afternoon. That would not be a problem at all, but the discussion is unlikely to be very productive if the delegations proposing substantive amendments do not circulate them in writing to all members of the Conference on Disarmament so that they can be considered in our respective capitals before we discuss them in the meeting room. Thank you, Mr. President. We are at your disposal.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France very much. What I would really like to happen is what you said at the end of your statement. That is to say, could any delegation wishing to make proposals please send them to us in writing. We will circulate them to all members of the Conference on Disarmament so that they have the information they need.

(*spoke in English*)

Thank you very much. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me first to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to welcome Ambassador Ahmed Ihab Abdelahad Gamaleldin, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and other colleagues who have recently joined us, and to wish them well in their new tasks.

My delegation welcomes your intention to proceed from where we left off last week, and thus to continue consultations to arrive at a document that enjoys the support of all member States and that will allow the work of the Conference to move forward. I assure you of our willingness to cooperate constructively with you and with other members on this path. The Syrian Arab Republic, like many members of the Conference, supports the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that includes a negotiating mandate. We are aware that the documents that have been negotiated so far fall short of achieving this goal, but we are prepared to contribute to a consensus if the concerns we expressed during our consultations with the previous presidency are taken into account.

I would like to thank you for your last proposal, which removed the ambiguity that prompted me to ask for the floor. It was clear last Friday that the Conference was not ready to adopt the documents proposed by the Belgian presidency by consensus because of concerns expressed by some delegations. The Syrian Arab Republic made specific comments to the Belgian presidency, and we reiterated our remaining concerns on Friday morning before the formal meeting. During the formal meeting, we also expressed our concerns and made it clear that we were open to discussing the Russian amendments that intersect with some of our concerns. Accordingly, we believe that the logical way to deal with the current situation is to continue consultations in the manner you deem appropriate, either through

bilateral consultations or through the organization of open-ended informal consultations, as is the practice of the Conference. I agree with the previous speaker that the problem we have faced today is due to the methodology that has been followed over the past few weeks and a departure from standard practice for various reasons. We therefore believe that the solution to this problem involves a return to the usual practice, through appropriate consultations that allow all States to express their concerns and allow us all to reach a consensus on the proposed texts. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you very much for your very constructive observations, Ambassador. I give the floor now to the Ambassador of the United States of America, to be followed by Germany, with the comprehension of our interpreters for some two or three minutes, if possible.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President. I will be very brief. Look, my delegation has not seen the Russian amendments on paper, and we need to see them on paper so that we can share them with our capitals. My preference would thus be – as I think I also heard from the French Ambassador – to see the proposed edits so that we can consult our capitals. I am not sure about convening a session this afternoon to discuss amendments that I have not seen – I may see them this afternoon during this session. It would only be fair to consult my capital about these amendments before returning to some informal or formal session to discuss them. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of the United States of America and give the floor to Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. Exactly as my French and American colleagues have said, we request that the Russian amendments and any other possible amendments by other delegations be circulated before we discuss them in an informal meeting this afternoon or at a later point, as my American colleague has just suggested.

Like France and others, we were ready to join consensus on the draft proposals tabled for adoption by the Belgian presidency last Friday, and if there are any new proposals we are very happy to consider them, of course, but I fear that the more time we allot for the discussion of new proposals, the further away we will move from the adoption of any of the proposals. But that is my personal assessment. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador. To put an end to our meeting, today, I would propose that we have an informal meeting tomorrow morning and that this afternoon we receive very few (I hope) proposed amendments from those who have amendments to propose so that we can work not only on the amendments but also on a draft of the revised decision on the programme of work that reflects the amendments, if any are received. That is what I propose – if anybody has another idea, I will give the floor to him or her.

The secretariat and I will thus be awaiting the written proposals from those who have proposals to make. I am not calling for proposals – I would like to receive only those that really touch on the subject of our possible consensus on the documents that have been distributed.

As for the next meeting, I will be in touch with the secretariat to see if we call a new meeting tomorrow or on Thursday, and you will be duly informed of that. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.