
Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Monday, 22 February 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Time

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



The President: Excellencies, dear delegates, good morning. I call to order the 1559th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. We begin this morning with the high-level segment.

Let me now turn to the list of speakers. I would like to mention that in the spirit of allowing for a smooth high-level segment to accommodate the video statements of officials at ministerial level, I intend in principle, today and for the duration of the high-level segment, to take all rights of reply to the addresses of the dignitaries, if any, at the end of the segment.

The Conference will first hear an address by Ms. Ann Christin Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden.

Ms. Linde (Sweden): Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, the past year has been a challenging one for all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on our societies, and well over 2 million people have lost their lives. However, through cooperation and multilateral efforts, 2021 has the potential to see us overcome many threats. The same resolve and spirit of collaboration needed to fight the virus are now required to address those threats that may cause untold human suffering.

Each passing year brings with it new hope that the Conference on Disarmament will find the political will necessary to break the deadlock which has paralysed it for far too long. That the Conference has not been able to adopt gender-neutral rules of procedure is quite telling and deeply troubling.

The items on the Conference agenda remain as relevant as ever, and as the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiation body, this forum carries a special responsibility. We cannot afford to let endless procedural debates stand in the way of much-needed substantive work. We call on all States to show flexibility and a pragmatic approach in the work ahead. We hope that this year holds more promise for getting the Conference back on track than the past two decades have.

Positive steps are urgently needed if we are to set the stage for a successful outcome of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference. In this regard, Sweden warmly welcomes the agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation to extend the New START, a crucial contribution to international and European security. We strongly encourage further talks and negotiations, including with China, on broader arms control agreements.

The upcoming NPT Review Conference provides a crucial opportunity for States parties to strengthen all three pillars of the Treaty. We need to reaffirm the validity of previous commitments and to achieve real and much-needed progress, not least in regard to article VI.

The Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament aims to do just that – to help make progress possible even in challenging times. Through a series of ministerial meetings – in Stockholm, Berlin and Amman – and the adoption of the Berlin Declaration and the 22 Stepping Stones, the Initiative's diverse group of 16 non-nuclear-weapon States strive to re-energize nuclear diplomacy.

By identifying ambitious, concrete and realistic steps that all States may take, but in particular nuclear-weapon States, the Initiative aims to reduce nuclear risks, advance nuclear disarmament and achieve a successful outcome at the Review Conference. In the months to come, members of the Stockholm Initiative will intensify our efforts and reach out to both nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States. We will engage with other initiatives and groups, both governmental and civil society, with the aim of reaching common ground and strengthening the Treaty.

Sweden would like to thank all those States that have already formally aligned with the Berlin documents, including the Stepping Stones proposal of the Stockholm Initiative, and invites all other States parties to the Treaty to do the same.

Mr. President, the time for action is upon us. What we need now is political leadership and constructive engagement, not least from the nuclear-weapon States. I thank you.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden very much and now give the floor to Mr. Heiko Maas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany.

Mr. Maas (Germany): “While disarmament [...] has become a necessity for the survival of mankind [...], little progress has been made since the end of the Second World War.” Madam Secretary-General, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, this is a quote from the historic resolution that created the Conference on Disarmament in 1978.

Of course, our global conventions banning biological, chemical and certain conventional weapons, as well as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, are important milestones. But the truth is that, over the years, too many of these agreements have been neglected or openly violated.

This year, however, a new perspective for disarmament is arising. The importance of the extension of the New START can hardly be overstated. Now, it is up to us to build on that success. Our first task is to get nuclear disarmament back on track.

Last year, the Stockholm Initiative presented a road map to advance nuclear disarmament. These practical steps – ranging from risk reduction and verification all the way to further stockpile reductions – remain on the table. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative has also made valuable recommendations to strengthen all aspects of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Review Conference later this year will be our opportunity to put these words into action – and to take decisive steps towards our common goal: a world without nuclear weapons.

Our second task is to counter proliferation and to end impunity. President Biden and Secretary Blinken have stated their readiness to rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action if Iran returns to full compliance. It is in Iran’s best interest to change course now, before the agreement is damaged beyond repair. As a participant in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, we expect nothing less from Tehran than full compliance, full transparency and full cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

North Korea also demands our full attention. Not only did it violate, and later leave, the Non-Proliferation Treaty but it is also constantly enhancing its forbidden nuclear and missile programmes. Staying united in our efforts to denuclearize North Korea is a matter of credibility. Combined with diplomatic engagement, that is our best chance to reach lasting peace.

Syria has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own population. These horrible crimes were clearly confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. And our duty, as responsible States, is to hold those who committed these acts accountable.

Ladies and gentlemen, our third big task is to rethink arms control, due to the changing face of technology. Artificial intelligence, biotech and cybersystems all bear great potential for human progress. But they also create new threats. Autonomous weapons operating outside of human control gravely undermine human rights and humanitarian law.

Addressing such risks is what maintaining security in the twenty-first century will be about. It is high time to develop necessary rules based on international law and through multilateral cooperation.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how vulnerable we are to a virus. Biological agents can be even more dangerous. The Biological Weapons Convention must therefore be updated to address new threats and rapid progress in biotechnology and science. This is the goal we should set ourselves for the upcoming Review Conference of the States parties to the Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen, arms control strengthens security. Disarmament saves lives. Forty-three years after the Conference on Disarmament was created, its huge potential still remains untapped. This needs to change. And the change can start here today, in 2021, a watershed year for arms control.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany very much. Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to say that today we have the honour

of having by our side the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya.

I have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Foreign Secretary of India.

Mr. Shringla (India): Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, it is an honour to address the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of Brazil, a fellow Group of 21 country with which India enjoys excellent bilateral relations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been perhaps the most disruptive global event in our collective memory. While the pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities, it has also underlined the need for global solidarity and strengthened multilateralism. Prime Minister Modi, by delivering on his promise at the United Nations General Assembly to make Indian-manufactured COVID vaccines both affordable and accessible to all of humanity, has once again shown that India is a force for global good.

We have the same approach to global issues, including those pertaining to international security and peace. In this regard, India is making an important contribution as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for 2021–2022.

We begin this year with hope and expectation. India has welcomed the extension of the New START between the Russian Federation and the United States of America. However, much work needs to be done by us in the Conference on Disarmament. We need to rise above our differences and demonstrate political will and genuine intent to find consensus to deliver on our collective mandate. Those resorting to politicization only weaken the mandate of this body.

The agenda of the Conference, which is the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, as mandated by the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, deals with critical challenges of disarmament and international security facing the international community. India advocates a comprehensive and balanced programme of work to enable the Conference to commence negotiations on issues of pressing global importance.

India is committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament. Our call for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a step-by-step process, as also outlined in our working paper on nuclear disarmament, submitted to the Conference on Disarmament in 2007, has an enduring relevance. India reiterates its call to undertake the steps outlined in the working paper, including negotiation in the Conference of a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention.

India has supported the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference on a fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein, which remains the most suitable basis for negotiations. I reaffirm today India's readiness to participate in negotiations on such a treaty in the Conference.

India, as a responsible nuclear-weapon State, is committed, as per its nuclear doctrine, to maintaining credible minimum deterrence with the posture of "no first use" and non-use against non-nuclear-weapon States.

Prevention of an arms race in outer space is another long-standing item on the Conference agenda. India looks forward to an early start of the negotiations of a legally binding instrument on this agenda item to address pressing issues relating to space security.

In line with the emphasis of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament on promoting expertise in disarmament and in empowering our younger generations, India has hosted a fully funded annual disarmament and international security fellowship programme for the last two years to advance disarmament education. I take this opportunity to invite fellow member States to participate in this programme.

Mr. President, this Conference has been plagued for far too long by fear, suspicion and mistrust. As Mahatma Gandhi said, the only cure for fear is faith; for suspicion, sincerity;

and for mistrust, trust. This is just what the Conference needs today to break its long deadlock and to make concrete progress. India stands ready to play its role and work with fellow member States to achieve our collective objectives. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Foreign Secretary of India very much, above all for the kind initial words for my country. I now have the honour to give the floor to Mr. Simon Coveney, Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Coveney (Ireland): Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on Brazil's assumption of the presidency. I assure you of Ireland's full cooperation and support.

Mr. President, while travel restrictions unfortunately prevent us from meeting in person, I am delighted to address the Conference on Disarmament again this year. The work of the United Nations in Geneva to address issues fundamental to the peace, prosperity and security of our world cannot be placed on hold.

Since joining the United Nations in 1955, Ireland has highlighted how the unrestricted use and spread of weapons, whether conventional weapons or weapons of mass destruction, undermines human security and hinders development.

It is essential that we take this broad, global perspective on how to tackle disarmament. The pandemic has been a stark reminder that risks can quickly become reality, with devastating global effects. It also reminds us of the necessity of collective action to address and overcome global challenges. There are few areas in which these lessons are more relevant than in multilateral disarmament.

As a starting point, our priority must be to implement existing commitments and to respond to new and emerging challenges. We need to move away from the polarization that has characterized the work of this body for far too long. Constructive engagement and cooperation, rooted in multilateralism and underpinned by robust evidence and expertise, is the only way forward.

For far too long, not least in this forum, we have failed to rise to our collective task. How can it be acceptable that the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to fulfil its mandate or reach agreement on new membership applications in over twenty years? Once again, I urge all States represented in this forum to extend all efforts to adopt a programme of work, so that we can make progress on the vital issues this chamber has been tasked to address.

There are, Mr. President, reasons to be optimistic, too, about what can be achieved. I welcome the extension of the New START for a further five years. I hope that this initial agreement will lead the Russian Federation, the United States and other countries to engage actively on broader follow-on agreements, including to limit and reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons, with the ultimate goal of their elimination.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on 22 January 2021, sending a powerful signal that the grave humanitarian risks posed by nuclear weapons are not acceptable. The Treaty gives the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) much-needed impetus on nuclear disarmament and is fully compatible with and complementary to the NPT. I urge those countries that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty, and to support its full implementation.

It is my hope that the positive momentum from these recent developments can create an environment where further progress is possible. Likewise, I welcome the 169th ratification, by Cuba, of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty as a further step. As the last legal instrument negotiated in this body, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has established a powerful global norm against nuclear-weapon testing. It is a demonstration of what can be achieved by the Conference on Disarmament. In this twenty-fifth anniversary year, I call, individually, on each of the eight annex 2 States that have not yet done so to show leadership and sign and ratify this Treaty. All States must abide by the moratorium on nuclear weapons test explosions or any other nuclear explosion.

Hopefully, in the summer, we will meet in New York at the NPT Review Conference, in an atmosphere conducive to success. The Review Conference affords us the opportunity to take stock of progress and to chart the course ahead for a treaty that has remained the

cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture for over fifty years. Let us work together to ensure tangible progress across all three pillars, not least in areas where progress has been slowest – namely, disarmament. As a starting point, it will be vital to reaffirm the commitment of all States to the consensus-based outcomes agreed over the past fifty years, including the unequivocal undertaking of the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.

As the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament reminds us, disarmament is not only vital for global security; it also saves lives. Ireland remains fully committed to the protection of civilians in conflict. We will continue our efforts to reach agreement on a political declaration that addresses the devastating humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. While face-to-face work on the declaration has been interrupted, Ireland is continuing its efforts to finalize a declaration that will result in reduced civilian harm.

Mr. President, 2020 was an extremely challenging year for all of us. The challenges of new ways of working underline the importance of dialogue, listening and broad participation, including by civil society. And of ensuring that women's voices are heard. I urge all participants to make every effort to overcome old differences and engage constructively to make real progress towards a safer world. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland very much. Now we will hear an address by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Mr. Mukhtar Tileuberdi.

Mr. Tileuberdi (Kazakhstan): Excellencies, at the outset, I congratulate Ambassador Gonçalo Mourão of Brazil, on assuming the presidency of the Conference and express my great hope for the effective and successful work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for collective action in a number of important areas of global governance, one of which is nuclear disarmament.

The recent entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a clear demonstration that nuclear disarmament remains a permanent and urgent priority. Kazakhstan's consistent support for the Treaty is based on its foreign policy priorities and First President Nursultan Nazarbayev's initiatives against nuclear weapons. In this regard, his proposal to create a global alliance of leaders for nuclear security and a world free of nuclear weapons also remains quite relevant.

This year, Kazakhstan is celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. One of the key events of August 2021 for Kazakhstan is the third awards ceremony for the Nazarbayev Prize for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World and Global Security, to be held in commemoration of the International Day against Nuclear Tests on 29 August.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev underlined that Kazakhstan's determination to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free-world has become an integral part of the country's national identity. We have a moral right to spearhead global actions to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons does not replace the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which remains a cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture – it complements it. The upcoming NPT Review Conference will take place in an unprecedented period of global uncertainty. We should not only reaffirm the decisions of previous conferences but also produce specific tasks for the next cycle.

Kazakhstan welcomes the extension of the New START between the Russian Federation and the United States. This step is a demonstration of responsible behaviour, commitment to the process of nuclear disarmament in accordance with article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the desire to prevent a dangerous arms race.

Today, it is critically important to maintain and strengthen the Conference on Disarmament, the core principle of which is consensus. We call on all participants to show political will and overcome differences so that the Conference can revitalize its work. Nuclear

disarmament issues, a fissile material cut-off treaty, prevention of an arms race in outer space and negative security assurances should remain among the key priorities.

Mr. President, the pandemic has highlighted once again the critical and long-debated urgency of creating a multilateral body to coordinate the implementation of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. President Tokayev of Kazakhstan has therefore proposed the establishment of a special multilateral body – the international agency for biological safety, which would be accountable to the Security Council. We plan to present very soon a concept paper which will allow all interested States to engage in an in-depth discussion of this proposal.

The Conference on Disarmament must therefore fulfil its mandate for the greater good of mankind and its safety and security. Thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan very much, including for the kind words addressed to this presidency. We will now hear an address by Ambassador Sameh Hassan Shokry Selim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Selim (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to express my country's appreciation for the efforts of the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament in providing support for the work of the Conference. I would like to reiterate my country's continued support for the presidency of the Conference and its constructive efforts to adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work. Egypt hopes that the 2021 session will be successful in revitalizing the effective role of the Conference.

The deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament that has persisted for more than two decades is detrimental to the credibility and role of the Conference, which has long been pivotal in the negotiation of international treaties and conventions in the field of disarmament. In this context, Egypt expresses its full support for holding the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament at the earliest opportunity in order to conduct a comprehensive review of the structure of the multilateral disarmament system.

Mr. President, despite repeated calls by Egypt and many members of the international community for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, the concept of nuclear deterrence remains prevalent in the military doctrines of nuclear States which are parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), in complete disregard of article VI of the Treaty more than 50 years after its entry into force. This indicates that their only motive for the indefinite extension of the treaty was their own possession of such weapons. This failure to implement article VI of the Treaty can only be considered a breach of the provisions of the Treaty.

Egypt remains concerned at the absence of a legally binding international treaty on negative security assurances. It considers that the argument put forward by some nuclear States that the security environment and international political situation are not conducive to moving forward with the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is based on faulty and unconvincing logic. On the contrary, nuclear disarmament is key to creating a better security environment and a more stable international situation.

In this regard, Egypt calls on nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their obligations to dispose of all their nuclear weapons and reaffirms its support for their efforts to begin negotiations on an international treaty banning the production of fissile material, which should also cover fissile material stockpiles, not only the future production of such materials. Furthermore, Egypt attaches great importance to developing and bolstering the existing legal system aimed at ensuring that outer space is used solely for peaceful activities and that it is preserved as a common heritage of humankind. For many years, Egypt and Sri Lanka have been submitting draft resolutions to the General Assembly on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The negotiations to develop a legally binding instrument to prevent an arms race in outer space are of the utmost importance, particularly given the alarming trends that are paving the way for the weaponization of outer space, as well as the anti-satellite capabilities that numerous States are developing.

The Middle East is a hotbed of regional and international instability, a situation aggravated by the presence there of a State that is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We would like to draw attention to the NPT Review Conferences of 1995, 2000 and 2010, which called upon Israel, the only Middle Eastern State that is not yet a party to the Treaty, to accede without delay and to place all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards in order to guarantee peace and security in the region.

Mr. President, Egypt will continue to participate actively and constructively in the Conference on Disarmament. It looks forward to making further contributions during the various meetings on the disarmament agenda for this year, in particular the NPT Review Conference scheduled to take place in New York in August 2021. Egypt hopes the Review Conference will result in a balanced and comprehensive final document on the three pillars of the Treaty. Egypt also recalls the commitment made by the international community to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East pursuant to the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, whose first session proved to be a practical opportunity for all States in the region to try to reach a binding agreement on the basis of consensus and the free will of States. Egypt hopes that all States in the region and other concerned States will participate in the second session of the Conference in November 2021. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt very much, including for the kind words for this presidency. We will now hear an address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. Stef Blok.

Mr. Blok (Netherlands): While COVID-19 has made international cooperation a lot more complex, it has also demonstrated how essential such cooperation is. We need to continue making progress and setting new goals when it comes to our international security environment and especially when it comes to arms control architecture for the twenty-first century, amid new and disruptive advances in technology.

For that reason, we welcome the extension of the New START. We hope that this is the start, or perhaps we should say the “new start”, of positive new steps in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

We do our work in a difficult and challenging environment. But we cannot blame circumstances for our failure to deliver. Not here. Not in any forum. Our discussions here are too important to be blocked by procedural arguments, as is happening on the topic of a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The Netherlands continues to promote a pragmatic approach by focusing on what we are here for: substance of great importance. Our “Back to Basics” working paper sets out guidelines for this.

We currently find ourselves in the run-up to the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the bedrock of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and the master key to moving towards a nuclear-free world. I cannot overstate the importance of this Conference.

The Treaty is the only legally binding commitment by the nuclear-weapon States to pursue negotiations on disarmament. But we should be honest in reviewing its implementation. Simply saying “the meeting is the message” is not enough. To make true progress, we need to take responsibility. Especially the countries with nuclear weapons.

As Chair of Main Committee III, the Netherlands will do its utmost to help make the Review Conference a success. Transparency, risk reduction, crisis stability and crisis management are major focus areas.

Furthermore, the Netherlands intends to make extra efforts on arms control, on emerging technologies and on reducing the vulnerability of space. We welcome the adoption of the United Kingdom-sponsored General Assembly First Committee resolution. And we will continue to work towards its implementation.

In closing, the Netherlands would like to take this opportunity, as the State holding the presidency of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, to call on those States outside

the Convention to sign up. We can end the suffering caused by these indiscriminate weapons, which remain dangerous for decades after conflicts have ended – 164 States have already joined. We hope more will follow.

Every new start begins with hope. And while Europe and my country are covered in layers of snow, and the temperature is rather inhospitable, to say the least, and while the tone of our discussions on nuclear weapons has been equally cold and at times inhospitable over the past few years, I do see some glimmers of hope. A spring of renewed energy to combat our problems together, to make our world nuclear-free. Let's make the extension of the New Start a new start for us all. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. We will now hear an address by Mr. Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister of Regional Cooperation of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Balasuriya (Sri Lanka): Mr. President, Madam Secretary-General and distinguished delegates, I am pleased to join this important international forum to reiterate the importance Sri Lanka attaches to the Conference on Disarmament as the world's sole multilateral disarmament negotiation forum. Our delegation assures you, Mr. President, of its full support and cooperation to find common ground for fulfilling the Conference's obligations to contribute to strengthened international peace and security.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm Sri Lanka's strong commitment and support for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Sri Lanka continues to remain concerned about the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and the threat such weapons pose to the survival of humanity.

Today, we are faced with one of the most challenging moments in human history. As with all obstacles, resolving these current crises requires renewed willingness to think and act collectively, especially to ensure the safety and security of the world we live in. The need for genuine efforts to achieve this goal is now more important than ever.

As we approach the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, it is disheartening to note a clear lack of political will to realize the important objectives of the Treaty. The implementation of disarmament commitments and obligations has stalled to a great extent, while the modernization of nuclear arsenals and the introduction of new types of nuclear weapons continue to take place. It is in this context that we welcome the extension of the New START, which is a positive step towards strategic stability and mutual confidence.

We believe that a legally binding instrument on unconditional negative security assurances is equally important for non-nuclear-weapon States. Despite repeated calls in this forum, we are yet to see any concrete action on this issue. We support ensuring that nuclear non-proliferation calls for effective and comprehensive control of the use of fissile materials, which will contribute to the gradual yet meaningful process of nuclear disarmament.

Sri Lanka underscores the importance of negotiating a binding agreement on prevention of an arms race in outer space. While we support any new initiative in this regard in the spirit of multilateralism, our objective for a comprehensive legally binding instrument on prevention of an arms race in outer space remains unchanged.

We are deeply concerned about the possibility of advanced weapon systems falling into the hands of terrorists. Their intentions and active efforts to acquire nuclear, biological, chemical weapons are certainly no longer within the realm of imagination alone.

This is why we believe that the full implementation of all multilateral disarmament treaties, including those covering biological and chemical weapons, will contribute immensely to our common fight against international terrorism. Commencement of early negotiations on new nuclear-weapon-free zones could also contribute to this objective.

Sri Lanka follows closely the ongoing deliberations in Geneva on autonomous weapons systems and remains convinced that the centrality of human control is fundamental. It is our hope that the ongoing discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems are not overtaken by fast-moving technological realities on the ground.

We are reiterating our disappointment with the stalemate and the failure to achieve consensus on the programme of work at the Conference on Disarmament. Nonetheless, Sri Lanka reaffirms its commitment to revive the much-delayed machinery of this Conference, as was evident in the adoption of the decision contained in document CD/2119 during Sri Lanka's presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2018.

Mr. President, we need to be conscious of the fact that emerging threats posed to humanity through challenges such as the ongoing pandemic and effects of climate change, coupled with the resultant socioeconomic and environmental fallout, could prompt various parties to utilize these weapons as a last resort, as political leverage for the pursuit of their interests. Therefore, the significance of the work of this Conference has become more important than ever before.

Sri Lanka appreciates the individual and collective commitments of all countries in the efforts of attaining the objectives of this Conference. We strongly believe that enhancing weaponry and the prevailing threat of its use will only feed into strengthening the vicious cycle that has so far seen no end. This could be ended only through a commitment to a peaceful and safer world.

I leave you with the words of the Dhammapada: "Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving kindness. This is an eternal law."

I thank you.

The President: I thank Mr. Tharaka Balasuriya, State Minister of Regional Cooperation of Sri Lanka. The Conference on Disarmament will now hear an address by Ambassador Raychelle Omamo, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya.

Ms. Omamo (Kenya): Allow me, Mr. President, to extend to you our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you, Mr. President, of Kenya's full support and cooperation.

Kenya attaches great importance to the Conference on Disarmament. Its unique mandate on multilateral arms control and disarmament issues makes it an integral forum for the maintenance of global peace and security and affirms its role as the single multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament.

Mr. President, 42 years after its inception, the Conference on Disarmament remains relevant and critical. The current global security environment is rife with increased geopolitical posturing, heightened tensions, a crumbling arms control architecture, modernization of defence systems, as well as increased spending on sophisticated weapons, including nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. These developments harm an already fragile international security environment and make a compelling case for the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged to ravage our planet. Its catastrophic effects have given greater impetus to calls for enhanced multilateral cooperation, as no State can fight this pandemic on its own.

Multilateralism is about working together for the common good of humanity. Hence, the international community in general and the Conference on Disarmament in particular must redouble their efforts to address long-standing global challenges such as disarmament and arms control as new challenges like COVID-19 emerge to destabilize our world.

At this juncture, allow me to welcome the positive strides taken by the United States of America and the Russian Federation in extending the New START for a further five years. Kenya encourages the two largest nuclear Powers to enhance their dialogue and cooperation with a view to further strengthening international arms control. While Kenya welcomes these bilateral arrangements, we firmly believe that the ultimate assurance for a safer world lies in multilateral arrangements.

Kenya regrets the double-decade impasse within the Conference on Disarmament. The perennial inability of the Conference on Disarmament to adopt its programme of work sends a negative signal to the international community that it is unable to achieve its mandate.

Kenya will join other progressive members to adopt a pragmatic approach to the issue of the programme of work.

As I conclude, Mr. President, I wish to inform you that as an elected non-permanent member of the Security Council, Kenya will advocate for continuous engagement with the Conference on Disarmament. I reaffirm Kenya's long-standing and unwavering commitment to nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and a world free of nuclear weapons. I thank you for your kind attention.

The President: I thank Ambassador Raychelle Omamo, Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya. We will now hear Mr. Washio Eiichiro, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Mr. Washio (Japan): Distinguished colleagues, I would like to express our appreciation to and reaffirm our support for and cooperation with Ambassador Mello Mourão, President of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Conference is the only multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament with the participation of key stakeholders, including all nuclear-weapon-possessing countries. Inclusiveness is key to ensuring that future outcomes become universal. Against the backdrop of the prolonged stalemate in the Conference, we need to build upon previous discussions and focus on mature agenda items. From this perspective, Japan reiterates the importance of commencing negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Moreover, the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is vital. We will continue to support the six member States that will hold the presidency of the Conference at its annual session and fully contribute to substantive discussions and early fulfilment of the Conference's mandate. We also look forward to appropriate discussion on outer space to address growing risks to its sustainable and stable use.

As the only country to have suffered atomic bombings during war, Japan is fully aware of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. It is our solemn responsibility to lead international efforts towards their total elimination. Currently, there are divergent approaches towards a world without nuclear weapons. It is vital to seek concrete measures which can serve as common ground to work together, while addressing both real security threats and the humanitarian consequences of the use of these weapons.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty is the cornerstone of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, and it is crucial to maintain and strengthen it. I would like to reconfirm the responsibility of all States parties to the Treaty for the full and steady implementation of the Treaty, including article VI. Japan will continue to fully contribute to realizing a meaningful outcome for the next Review Conference by making concrete proposals as common ground for countries with divergent views. This includes our General Assembly resolution on nuclear disarmament, the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and the Stockholm Initiative, as well as a track 1.5 meeting for substantive advancement of nuclear disarmament.

Japan welcomes the extension of the New START, which is expected to contribute to discussions building up to the next Review Conference. I would like to express our strong hope that this extension will lead to the development of a broader framework of arms control, which involves not only the United States and Russia but also other countries and covers a wider range of weapon systems.

We should also work together on non-proliferation. In this regard, the full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions is indispensable to achieving the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantlement of North Korea's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, and her team for their valuable work, as COVID-19 has changed usual working methods. Japan will continue to strive to promote nuclear disarmament and cooperate closely with Conference members. Thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank Mr. Washio Eiichiro, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, including for the kind words for this presidency and Ms. Valovaya and her team.

(spoke in French)

I now give the floor to Ms. Sophie Wilmès, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium.

Ms. Wilmès (Belgium) *(spoke in French)*: Mr. President, please allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of the support of Belgium in your endeavours and wish you every success.

Please also allow me to warmly thank the six Presidents of the current session, together with the last President of the 2020 session and the first President of the 2022 session for the intense cooperation they engaged in in a bid to adopt a programme of work. Belgium was associated with those efforts this year in its role as the first member State to hold the presidency of this year's session.

It is deeply regrettable that we were unable to adopt the programme of work during the Belgian presidency, but I wish to reiterate my complete confidence in your leadership, Mr. President, and in the ability of Brazil to find a way out of the impasse. I call on all States to continue working tirelessly in this direction.

The absence of an agreement on a programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament seriously undermines the credibility of multilateral institutions. It renders us vulnerable to initiatives that are out of touch with reality and that defeat the purpose of our efforts. It is incumbent upon us all to engage in the maintenance of a robust multilateral system that delivers results.

The year 2021 began with a remarkable achievement: the extension of the New START. This important contribution to strategic stability has put an end to fears of a new arms race. The decision underscores the fact that arms control has a unique role to play in confidence-building measures and that tangible results are possible, even in times of growing insecurity and deep distrust between the major Powers.

Blocked from fulfilling its mandate for far too long, the Conference on Disarmament must draw inspiration from the agreement between the United States and Russia. Indeed, the success of this Conference depends on the willingness of every member State to assume its full responsibility in this collective effort to build a safer and more prosperous world by accelerating disarmament.

This responsibility also extends to procedural and organizational matters. It is regrettable that certain members have opposed requests from other States to observe our work. This is a serious affront to the principles of effective and inclusive multilateralism.

This year, the year of the Review Conference, my country reaffirms its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This Treaty is not only an invaluable bulwark against the risk of proliferation but also the expression of our aspirations for a world free of nuclear weapons. These aspirations are gaining ground in the international community; we must be sensitive to this fact if we are to live up to expectations and make real progress.

This nuclear-weapon-free world can be built only with the contribution of all States, not least the nuclear-possessor States. To this end, it is vital that India, Israel and Pakistan join the Treaty without delay or preconditions.

We encourage the United States and Russia to seize the opportunity offered by the extension of the New START and enter into negotiations on reducing the number of nuclear weapons of all categories. We support reducing by a third the strategic arsenals deployed by these two States and call for a rebalancing of non-strategic stockpiles as part of an effective dismantlement policy. Additional efforts are expected of all nuclear-weapon States with a view to lessening the importance given to nuclear weapons in military doctrine and reducing nuclear risk.

We welcome the measures to reduce stockpiles and means of delivery that have been taken by the United Kingdom and France in recent decades. We would encourage China, the sole nuclear-weapon State still developing its nuclear arsenal, to draw inspiration from these examples and to review its build-up policy. A Chinese moratorium on the production of

fissile material for military ends and an increase in transparency with regard to its military doctrine and posture would also constitute positive steps forward.

A world without nuclear weapons will never see the light of day while nuclear tests are still being conducted. If States declare their support for nuclear disarmament, they cannot then refuse to accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This is also true for States that have acceded to any treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons.

Disarmament without verification leads to disarmament without trust. Treaties such as the New START provide for multifaceted verification measures. Nuclear disarmament verification requires the establishment of new techniques and procedures. Several initiatives are focused on this task, and Belgium is actively contributing to the work of one of them: the international partnership set up by the United States. This technical expertise must quickly be used to pave the way for substantive political progress and commitment in the field of disarmament.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Sophie Wilmès, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, including for her kind words for the presidency.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to Ms. Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Ms. Zaharieva (Bulgaria): Mr. President, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Excellencies, dear friends, I am pleased to present my country's views related to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Today, as we face security challenges of an increasingly complex nature, multilateralism is needed more than ever if we are to achieve global peace, security and prosperity. The Conference has an impressive record in serving the objectives of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. We need genuine political will for the Conference to move ahead.

Being part of the joint efforts of the six Conference presidencies for 2021, Bulgaria believes firmly that we can advance only by working together in the spirit of good faith and mutual respect.

The recent agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START is proof that progress in addressing the challenges to strategic stability is achievable. The continued implementation of the Treaty, along with constructive and active dialogue and further arms control negotiations, is a way to effective treaty-based nuclear arms control and disarmament.

Beyond the increased level of predictability, the extension of the New START generates positive momentum for the forthcoming Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, as well as for our common endeavour in the Conference on Disarmament.

As a State member of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Republic of Bulgaria continues to uphold its disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation agreements and commitments. We share the ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. A solid foundation that guides us towards achieving this goal is provided by the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We believe that the only realistic way to attain the goal of effective, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament is through a progressive approach based on practical and feasible steps. It is also essential to take into account the complex security environment and strategic context.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban-Treaty continues to be an important building block in the construction of a world without nuclear weapons. As an annex 2 State that has signed and ratified the Treaty, the Republic of Bulgaria continues to call upon all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty without any further delay.

The maturity of the issue of a fissile material cut-off treaty and the necessity of beginning related negotiations as soon as possible are beyond any doubt. For us, this is a long-time priority and a logical next step in nuclear disarmament.

As a member of the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in 2019–2021, Bulgaria is sparing no efforts to preserve the full and effective implementation of all decisions taken under the Chemical Weapons Convention. We should not under any circumstances allow the violation of the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, negotiated at this forum.

We are convinced that the proposal of the six Conference on Disarmament presidencies for 2021 for a programme of work can be the basis of a successful common effort to fulfil the Conference's mandate. After all, what we all agree upon is the need for the Conference to start working.

In concluding, we believe that expanding the Conference membership could be one of the ways to add even more relevance to the work of this body. Thank you for your attention.

The President: I thank Ms. Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria. Now we will hear an address by Mr. Jarmo Viinane, Ambassador for Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

Mr. Viinane (Finland): Excellencies, dear delegates, the circumstances of international meetings remain exceptional. The pandemic has forced severe restrictions on the work of the Conference on Disarmament. At the same time, disarmament and arms control are needed more than ever to enhance international peace and security.

As the single multilateral negotiation forum for disarmament matters, the Conference on Disarmament has a unique role in advancing international peace and security. The work of the Conference is as important as it is demanding. The Conference has been in a stalemate for too long. There are questions and doubts as to the relevance of the Conference. It is up to each of us to retain the Conference as a significant body in advancing disarmament.

In nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, our focus must remain on ensuring a forward-looking and successful Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Past Treaty commitments in all three pillars – disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy – remain valid and form the basis for making further progress in accomplishing the objectives of the Treaty. It is essential that the Review Conference send an unequivocal message that nuclear weapons must never be used again.

In nuclear disarmament, ambition and realism are needed in equal measure. The Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament has successfully combined both approaches. The result is a package of practical and achievable measures to advance nuclear disarmament. We hope that these proposals will continue to attract even wider support. The initiative Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament has facilitated active dialogue and engagement between nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon States. We hope that this engagement will lead to a better understanding of the imperatives, possibilities and challenges of nuclear disarmament and pave the way towards achieving it.

In a volatile environment, the predictability and stability that arms control can bring are more important than ever. Finland welcomes the decision by the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START for a further five years. We encourage these two States, the biggest nuclear Powers, to seek further reduction in their strategic nuclear arsenals and expand the scope of nuclear arms control to cover non-strategic nuclear weapons and new types of weapon systems.

Dear colleagues, our ultimate goal is a world free of nuclear weapons, with increased security for all. There is no shortcut to this goal. Nuclear disarmament is complicated, it is difficult, but it is possible. It is high time for all the nuclear-weapon possessors to show a stronger commitment to and take concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament.

I wish the Conference on Disarmament the best of success for its work in 2021.

The President: I thank Mr. Jarmo Viinane, Ambassador for Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Now we will hear an address by Ms. Eva-Maria Liimets, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

Ms. Liimets (Estonia): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, 2020 was an unusual year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also greatly disrupted our activities in disarmament

forums. The current health crisis has shown that it takes a coordinated global effort and effective multilateralism to address both current and future challenges.

We find ourselves in a difficult international security environment. The rules- and treaty-based international security order has started to erode. Some States have disregarded long-standing core principles of international law, violated their international obligations and are not complying with relevant international mechanisms. This is our collective concern. Against this backdrop, we welcome the extension of the New START by the United States and the Russian Federation. We hope it will lead to negotiations on broader follow-on agreements and encourage China to engage in these discussions.

The re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons is a worrying trend. In 2020, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons confirmed the deplorable 2017 use of chemical agents by Syria. In August 2020, a Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, was poisoned using a military chemical nerve agent. Estonia strongly condemns the poisoning of Mr. Navalny and any attempts to use chemical weapons to intimidate political opponents. It is vital to further advance the global norm on the prohibition of chemical weapons. Estonia will continue to address these threats as an elected member of the Security Council for the period 2020–2021.

We need to ensure the successful outcome of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in August 2021 and to strengthen the role of the Treaty as a major multilateral instrument of international security. Estonia shares the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons, pursued in a realistic and responsible way. To this end, Estonia supports the commencement of the negotiations within the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

In this context, let me reiterate our wish to take part in any future negotiations and Estonia's request since 2001 to participate equally, as a member State, in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We deeply regret the rejection of the observer status requests of several United Nations Member States, including a fellow European Union member State, Cyprus, this year.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, the Conference on Disarmament is the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiation body, and it is the responsibility of its members to ensure its relevance. The Conference should continue the strategic dialogue and discuss its core topics. It should also be able to address new challenges such as the weaponization of new technologies, cyberthreats and other emerging issues. We have seen a lot of goodwill and readiness to compromise in the Conference this year. Conference members should build on this to put the Conference back on track.

Let me conclude by extending my best wishes to all the Presidents of the 2021 session. You can count on Estonia's full support. Thank you.

The President: I thank Ms. Eva Liimets, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia, which is an observer country, for her country's active participation at this high-level segment.

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, this closes our list of speakers for the time being and so concludes our business for this morning.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place this afternoon at 3 p.m., when we will hear the addresses of the high-level speakers on the list that was transmitted to you earlier. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.