

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Tuesday, 23 February 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Gonalo de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mouro..... (Brazil)

The President: Good morning, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. Dear colleagues, this morning we continue the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament, hearing the addresses of the dignitaries on today's list of speakers.

It is my pleasure to inform you that we have the Secretary-General of the Conference, Madam Valovaya, at the table with us again today.

Before starting, I would like to present our condolences to Italy for the death of Ambassador Luca Attanasio, Italian Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who was murdered yesterday in that country. Our sincere condolences to the Italian people and the Italian Government.

Before turning to the list of speakers, I would like only to reiterate what I said yesterday morning: that in the spirit of allowing for a smooth high-level segment and to accommodate the video statements of officials at the ministerial level today and for the duration of the high-level segment, I intend, in principle, to take all points of order and requests for right of reply to the addresses of the dignitaries, if any, at the end of the segment.

So, going to our list of speakers, the first address we will be hearing is to be given by His Excellency Ivan Korčok, the Minister for European and Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Mr. Korčok (Slovak Republic): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency. You can count on the full support of Slovakia.

Mr. President, the international security environment, together with the arms control and disarmament regime, has been deteriorating. We have witnessed violations of international norms and constant military build-up, including development of new types of weapons. The increasing dependence of our societies on digital and outer space domains creates new vulnerabilities. New and emerging technologies pose challenges to international security and stability.

For a year now, the world has been fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. We should embrace this unprecedented situation as an opportunity rather than view it as another degrading factor for our disarmament work. We need more flexibility and political will; we need more cooperation and multilateralism.

This year has already started with encouraging news; the agreement between the United States and Russia on the extension of the New START for five years, which could set a positive tone for our work, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review cycle. It should serve as an impetus to continue dialogue on future arms control arrangements, prospectively engaging other States.

The Conference on Disarmament bears special responsibility for moving the disarmament agenda forward. The decades-long deadlock and absence of consensus for negotiations should not discourage us. We should strive to advance our substantive work through all possible avenues; including through substantive discussions within subsidiary bodies. We support this pre-negotiating work. The strengthened coordinated approach of the group of the six member States that will occupy the presidency this session is also very helpful. It brings renewed positive dynamics into the work of the Conference. We commend the presidencies of Belgium and Brazil for all their efforts to resume substantive work in the Conference this year.

The outcome of the NPT Review Conference will be crucial for the work of the Conference on Disarmament. As a starting point, we need to reaffirm the centrality of the Treaty to the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and further enhance implementation of all commitments undertaken during the previous review conferences. Slovakia supports balanced approach to all three pillars of the Treaty.

We support a progressive, step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament that takes into account the prevailing security environment; early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; early commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty in the Conference on Disarmament on the basis of the Shannon mandate; and inclusion of other areas, such as nuclear disarmament verification and nuclear risk reduction. Furthermore, International Atomic Energy Agency comprehensive safeguards agreements,

together with additional protocols, should constitute the current verification standard. It is also necessary to further promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

We attach great importance to preservation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. We regret the withdrawal of the United States from the Plan of Action but welcome positive signals from the new United States Administration. We remain deeply concerned at the actions of Iran that are inconsistent with the Plan. Continuation of dialogue, respect for international law and strong political will are necessary to put the Plan of Action fully back on track.

The nuclear and ballistic missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are of great concern to the international community. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to meaningful negotiations and take concrete and credible steps towards building trust and confidence and abandoning all its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner.

In the spirit of multilateralism, all interested United Nations Member States should be allowed to participate in the Conference's work as observers. It is therefore highly regrettable that this year five States were denied observer status.

Mr. President, despite the pandemic, we need to strive to make progress in disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. The year 2021 provides us with this opportunity and the Conference on Disarmament has a role to play. Thank you very much for your attention.

The President: I thank the Minister for European and Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Dmytro Kuleba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Kuleba (Ukraine): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, Ukraine is one of the major contributors to international peace and security. In 1994, Ukraine took an unprecedented step and gave up the world's third largest nuclear arsenal. Since then, Ukraine has been actively engaged in the global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

The Conference on Disarmament is an important multilateral platform for arms control negotiations, making it possible to maintain dialogue. International legal instruments discussed at this forum comprise an essential part of the modern global security architecture.

Ukraine regrets the Conference's protracted stalemate and urges it to resume substantive work on a range of other important agreements. This includes a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices and a legally binding instrument on negative security assurances.

I believe disarmament should be seen in a broader context of global security. When a certain country systematically violates basic United Nations norms and principles, we can hardly reach any significant viable progress in the field of disarmament.

As we meet today, Russia continues to illegally occupy Donbas and Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. It is even more concerning that Russia has been upgrading its military presence in Crimea with nuclear capabilities, undermining the non-nuclear status of the Ukrainian peninsula. This can hardly be seen as the responsible behaviour of a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.

Ukraine has launched a special initiative called the Crimea Platform in this regard. This international format is designed to consolidate international efforts to address the problem of the occupation of Crimea on the level of Governments, parliaments and experts.

We plan to hold the inaugural Crimea Platform Summit later this year in Kyiv. I strongly encourage all States to participate in this initiative, which is vital to improving the security situation in Europe and ensuring that international law prevails.

Mr. President, Ukraine recognizes that the Conference has the important task of negotiating new disarmament instruments. At the same time, we believe that parallel to these important efforts, the Conference must pay due attention to the issue of adherence to already

existing treaties and arrangements. This includes the Budapest Memorandum, the Chemical Weapons Convention and others.

It is a priority task for United Nations Member States to find practical ways to ensure that international legal norms on non-proliferation and arms control do not remain on paper alone but are properly enforced and fully respected. This is especially relevant this year, as we have the important task of summing up and shaping the future of the five-year operation periods of three key components of the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regime at review conferences for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, respectively.

We must remain wary of those who do not hesitate to use weapons of mass destruction, those who defend perpetrators of such use and those who distort and manipulate facts in order to discredit independent international entities and obstruct their functioning.

Mr. President, Winston Churchill once said: “Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong – these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.”

Let us stop the vicious circle of history and instead listen to the advice of those who have been able to overcome global threats in the past. It is long past time to achieve tangible results in the Conference on Disarmament. Let us not forget our duty to the coming generations: a world at peace. Effective disarmament and non-proliferation are absolutely indispensable to realizing our vision of a better world for all. Ukraine stands ready to continue contributing practically to achieve this goal. The time to act is now. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Mr. Dmytro Kuleba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Zbigniew Rau, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland.

Mr. Rau (Poland): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, thank you for the invitation. I am very glad to take the floor. Let me share with you a few points, important from the Polish perspective.

To begin with, the COVID-19 pandemic showed us how important it is to act together. Shared responsibility and solidarity are also crucial when it comes to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

We therefore believe that the activity of the Conference on Disarmament – which has been at a standstill since the 1990s, mostly due to the lack of political will – needs a new boost. Its agenda should follow rapid technological progress, especially in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems or cybercapabilities.

The extension of the New START contributes to maintaining strategic stability between the United States and the Russian Federation. Still, we believe that the parties should conclude a broader follow-on agreement, which should cover all nuclear weapons, including non-strategic nuclear weapons and new types of nuclear armaments.

We hope that the coming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference will translate into further progress in nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Poland, as Chair of Main Committee II, will do its utmost to contribute to a positive outcome of the Conference.

A key question on the diplomatic agenda is the Iranian nuclear programme. We express full support for the verification activities the International Atomic Energy Agency. We believe the interested parties will find a solution to the issue of compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Poland, as a current member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, is highly interested in limiting nuclear proliferation worldwide. In this context, we must not lose sight of the nuclear threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We should aim at its denuclearization.

Ever since the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, we have made great progress in our efforts to free the world from this inhumane tool. Still, the chemical attacks in Syria or the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in Russia are very disturbing developments. The strong support for our United Nations General Assembly resolution on the implementation of the Convention shows that the international community shares our concerns.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Poland makes every effort possible in respect of non-proliferation and arms control. We encourage you to join us in our efforts. Thank you.

The President: I thank Mr. Zbigniew Rau, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Dan Neculăescu, State Secretary for Strategic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Neculăescu (Romania): Mr. President, Madam Secretary-General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I am honoured to have the opportunity to present Romania's views at today's high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament and to come before you with a strong message of support for the work of this unique forum in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations.

Let me congratulate you, Mr. President, for your assumption of the current presidency and pledge Romania's full support for your work. I wish all Presidents of the 2021 session every success in their common endeavour to advance the work of the Conference this year.

From the very beginning, I would like to convey Romania's strong support for all efforts aimed at advancing effective multilateral solutions in the area of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament.

Since last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has added unprecedented circumstances to an already complicated international environment with many security challenges that we have to address. However, nothing should impede us from stepping up our efforts to deliver the best responses possible to the current global challenges to international peace and security.

In order to maintain the relevance of the Conference, we all need to assume our responsibilities, creating an atmosphere of compromise and flexibility, which could guide us all to a positive outcome.

Romania stands ready to work together with its partners for the success of the tenth Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in August 2021. We remain committed to upholding and preserving the integrity of the NPT regime and call on all parties to work together towards the goal of achieving the universality of the Treaty and enhancing its implementation, across all three of its equally important and mutually reinforcing pillars. The outcome of the Review Conference will depend on our collective effort to strengthen the viability of the Treaty, an instrument which has so far delivered on its promises. Romania remains committed to a progressive and pragmatic approach to achieving nuclear disarmament and believes that the Treaty remains the best route to work towards a world without nuclear weapons, with no shortcuts in the process.

Romania has stated on several occasions its position that the immediate start of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material cut-off treaty is the next logical step for advancing nuclear disarmament and preventing proliferation. We are also convinced that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty's entry into force would be a step further towards a safer world and continue to stand behind this objective.

In addition, we welcome efforts to enhance the common understanding between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States, and, in this regard, we emphasize the initiative Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament, in which Romania is also involved, as a concrete contribution to our shared goal of nuclear disarmament, through constructive and realistic dialogue.

Effective and verifiable arms control contributes to international stability, and therefore we welcome the recent agreement between the United States and Russia to extend the New START for five years. We see the Treaty's extension as the beginning, not the end, of an effort to address nuclear threats and new and emerging challenges to strategic stability.

Mr. President, the current experience with the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted biological risks and vulnerabilities. Terrorism and the rapid developments in biotechnology pose new challenges to all of us and render the Biological Weapons Convention particularly topical. The Review Conference of the Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, when feasible, and in the manner allowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, will represent a timely occasion to properly address the misuse of science for purposes prohibited by the Convention.

Let me conclude by expressing my belief that we must show much-needed political will and foster mutual understanding in order to preserve the unique role of the Conference on Disarmament if we are to achieve a safer and more peaceful world. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the State Secretary for Strategic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania. And now we will hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Choi Jong Kun, First Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Choi Jong Kun (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, Madam Secretary-General, distinguished delegates, it is my great pleasure and privilege to address the Conference on Disarmament. But I am also humbled, as we meet at a very compelling moment for the very future of global disarmament.

This compelling moment is characterized by an erosion of consensus and deadlock in the disarmament community. Non-traditional security challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping across the globe even as we speak threaten to change our way of life. If the collective wisdom of humanity underpinned by multilateralism fails to rein in the black elephant today, it will also come back with a very high price tag tomorrow. This is the reason we have gathered here to revisit a subject as complex as the arms control architecture. As a matter of fact, we stand at a critical juncture.

At the same time, the extension of the New START earlier this month speaks to the fact that we can remain optimistic, given that our ideals of arms control have been revived. The Republic of Korea therefore welcomes this latest feat by the Governments of the United States and Russia.

As a nation striving to achieve complete denuclearization and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula, we hope that this positive development will also generate fresh momentum for our joint endeavours to address ongoing disarmament and non-proliferation issues across the board, including peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

As we prepare for the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in August 2021 and look ahead to the Treaty's next fifty years, my Government naturally joins others in calling upon the relevant States to engage in genuine dialogue to move us forward in achieving our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons in accordance with the Treaty.

Bearing in mind that the global disarmament architecture is only as durable as the commitment of its constituents, the Republic of Korea, for its part, has actively engaged in collective efforts such as the Stockholm Initiative for Nuclear Disarmament. The resolution on youth, disarmament and non-proliferation adopted by consensus at the General Assembly is another contribution that the Republic of Korea will continue to make to secure the sustainability of our efforts well into the future.

And it goes without saying that the Conference on Disarmament needs to do its part as well – it has to regain its credibility as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. My Government welcomes the initiative put forth by this year's six Presidents – the P6 – to bring the Conference on Disarmament back to its proper place. We call on member States to take a practical, flexible and realistic approach to advancing substantive discussions on key deliverables, including a fissile material cut-off treaty.

As a country that is not free from the threat of war, the Republic of Korea has exerted substantive efforts to transform this daily threat into everyday peace. Indeed, the Korean Peninsula peace process is our enduring commitment to achieving complete denuclearization and establishing permanent peace in our part of the world. We have tirelessly and without any hesitation initiated diplomatic ventures engaging the Democratic People's Republic of Korea along with the United States and other relevant parties. The 19 September

comprehensive military agreement sealed between the two Koreas in 2018, basic as it may be, offers operational arms control, thereby reconstructing the demilitarized zone into a relatively stable buffer zone and serving as an enabler for relevant actors to concentrate on advancing denuclearization.

We have chosen this route not because we want to but because we have to. Building upon the hard-won momentum gained thus far, we will continue to work with our friends and partners to achieve our shared goal of complete denuclearization through peaceful means. In the same vein, we ask the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to respond to our call for the resumption of dialogue. In this respect, we count on the unwavering support of the international community.

Mr. President, Madam Secretary-General, distinguished delegates, in closing, allow me to reaffirm once again that the Republic of Korea stands ready to work with all member States committed to overcoming the long deadlock and polarization. The Conference on Disarmament is entrusted with the solemn mission of promoting international peace and security as the cradle of multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements. And we all know that a mission accomplished depends solely on our political will. Let us move forward. Thank you.

The President: I thank the First Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Nikolaos-Georgios Dendias, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece.

Mr. Dendias (Greece): Mr. President, dear colleagues, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the international community and our respective societies in ways unimaginable just a year ago. COVID-19 has also affected the disarmament and non-proliferation edifice. It has, moreover, disrupted the work and meetings of the Conference on Disarmament.

However, it is our duty to do our utmost to overcome challenges. And this, in the conviction that arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation remain key components of the strategic stability of our rules-based international system.

Greece is committed to a treaty-based, legally binding, viable and functional arms control system. It must be cooperative in nature, consistent with the principles of international law, responsive to current scientific and technological developments and able to provide credible security assurances to all States parties.

We remain steadfast in the belief that, by addressing asymmetries and imbalances, the way towards complete and verifiable nuclear disarmament is achievable. This can be done through a step-by-step approach. To that end, we welcome the extension of the New START.

At the multilateral level, we call upon all States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and urge the international community to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty in the Conference on Disarmament.

We firmly support the preservation and universalization of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its three pillars: nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. These are the core of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. Addressing the triptych of the Treaty in a balanced approach will be a central issue at the upcoming tenth Review Conference in August.

Mr. President, I would like now to refer to the issue of enlargement, to which Greece attaches great importance. As you know, we are the longest-standing observer that has formally expressed interest in joining the Conference on Disarmament. Given our contribution to the preservation of peace and our constructive engagement in all disarmament forums, we see no legitimate reason or justification to prolong this limbo.

It is indeed an anachronism that the only negotiating disarmament forum does not evolve in accordance with the demands of the post-cold war international system. In the same spirit, it is equally outdated to hold the participation of observers hostage to bilateral issues, issues which have absolutely no relevance to the subject matter of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Conference cannot afford to remain in an indefinite negotiating deadlock. It should begin substantive work through the adoption of a programme of work. If this is not possible, the Conference on Disarmament should restart deliberations in the format of subsidiary bodies, aiming at building convergence on all agenda issues.

Greece, bearing in mind the central position of the Conference in the international security architecture, has recognized the success of the Conference as a priority and stands ready to contribute substantially to this effect. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank Mr. Nikolaos-Georgios Dendias, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece. We will now hear an address by the Honourable Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Bartolo (Malta): Mr. President, colleagues, it is my honour to address this high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament as we come together to discuss the most pertinent issues and recent developments in the world of disarmament.

Malta welcomes the recent announcement by the United States and Russia of the agreed extension of the New START for five additional years. In striving for global disarmament, Malta attaches the highest importance to the New START as the only remaining bilateral nuclear arms control agreement between the two major nuclear Powers.

The extension of this Treaty gains more importance when understood in the current political scenario. Firstly, the United States and Russia, as the two biggest possessors of nuclear arms, ran the risk of having no legally binding, verifiable limits on each other's arsenals for the first time since 1972. Secondly, we have recently witnessed the worrying erosion of major disarmament instruments, the result of a climate of ever-greater friction and distrust.

In this regard, Malta attaches the highest importance to the New START and regards it as a crucial contribution to international and European security. The reduction of deployed strategic nuclear arsenals under the New START, enhanced notably by its robust verification mechanism, contributes to much-needed trust and predictability.

Through its verifiable legal limits set on the number of deployed strategic nuclear weapons and on deployed and non-deployed missiles, bombers and launchers, the Treaty increases mutual confidence, resulting in enhanced regional and global security. This development augurs well for all States globally, since it is a known fact that no country, big or small, would be immune to the devastating effects that would transcend national borders were nuclear weapons ever to be deployed again, by intention or accident.

Malta equally embraces this extension in terms of its contribution to the implementation of both States' nuclear disarmament obligations under article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which we perceive as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. By increasing predictability and the mutual confidence of the two largest nuclear-weapon States, the New START limits strategic competition and increases strategic stability.

We strongly believe that this renewal should only be the start of a greater effort towards disarmament and further cooperation between the United States and Russia. This should ultimately lead to additional agreements, ideally to the conclusion of a broader agreement that would cover all nuclear weapons, including non-strategic nuclear weapons and new types of nuclear armaments.

Malta encourages the United States and Russia to build on this diplomatic momentum and to allow for further progress in nuclear reduction talks with other States. This extension demonstrates the mutual benefits of cooperation, which should similarly be the focus of future diplomacy on wider disarmament-related issues. In light of recent worrying news, we hope for major Powers to act as catalysts and generate a wind of change to improve the international political environment, thereby strengthening international peace.

In this regard, Malta welcomes the incoming United States Administration and is encouraged by the initial signs of serious desire to cooperate on issues of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. We look forward to the intensification by the incoming Administration of its negotiation efforts with other world leaders in addressing global

challenges in the area of nuclear proliferation, including but not limited to the status of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the situation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. President, this new year has commenced on a relatively positive note in terms of nuclear issues, as we have finally witnessed some encouraging steps forward in disarmament-related diplomacy. In addition to the New START's extension, the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons earlier this year came as the first comprehensive global ban on nuclear arms and strengthened the global norm against the worst of weapons of mass destruction.

While these are notable achievements, our efforts should not stop here, as we still find ourselves at a critical juncture. Ensuring the success of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is now our collective responsibility. It is our duty to promote the benefits of the Treaty, help fight misconceptions about it and ensure that obligations arising from it are adhered to. Similarly, the cooperative attitudes required for the New START's extension are a demonstration of the political will required going into the upcoming Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. In strengthening what is left of the disarmament architecture and embracing a multilateral approach to security, we can further guarantee a safer and more prosperous future for humanity.

In conclusion, the indications are that while risks remain, more cooperative times are upon us, and we should grasp this opportunity with both hands to put an end to the degradation of arms control treaties. The possession of nuclear weapons by a select number of States not only acts as a major source of political anxiety to the wider international community but also presents an existential threat to humanity. The recent progress has the potential to stimulate further action on disarmament, and, as States seeking prosperity through peace, it is crucial to capitalize on this and move closer towards a world without nuclear weapons, a world where the spirit of dialogue and combined effort trumps that of belligerence and intimidation. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Malta. The Conference on Disarmament will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Gheorghe Leucă, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr. Leucă (Republic of Moldova): Mr. President, at the outset, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in leading the work of the body towards the expected outcome. I would also like to thank the members of the Conference for accepting our request to participate in its work this year as a non-member country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many areas of our lives and taken a huge toll on the public health and socioeconomic well-being of all our countries. At the same time, this unprecedented crisis has highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation, flexibility and coordinated responses. It has also had an impact on the activity of many international forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, which we will have to address together. And so, in this context of stronger calls for cooperation, for effective multilateralism, mutual support and cohesion, I am pleased to address you today at the Conference.

My country is firmly committed to preserving effective treaty-based international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation as key elements of security all over the globe. Disarmament and the work done by the Conference on Disarmament, which remains the world's single multilateral negotiating body in this field, are of special importance to the Republic of Moldova.

We understand and feel on our own skin, if I may say so, the need and urgency of going beyond never-ending challenges, focusing on technical work when we deal with disarmament. Having ammunition stockpiles from Soviet times of more than 20,000 tons on our territory – but outside the control of the Moldovan constitutional authorities – is a major concern. The risks are high, not only at the local level but at the regional level as well. It is a clear example of a common need – to start practical work, resume the destruction and

withdrawal of these stockpiles, reducing and avoiding delays caused by protracted procedural debates.

The ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty by the Republic of Moldova attests to my country's commitment to international efforts to strengthen peace and security at the global and regional levels. At the same time, we must reiterate that there is a strongly expressed belief by the Republic of Moldova that this Treaty should not only ensure transparency and accountability in transfers of conventional weapons by itself but should also help prevent illicit trafficking of such arms, particularly to separatist unrecognized entities. This is of vital importance to my country, especially in the current regional security context.

The Republic of Moldova will further contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and will support the efforts of the States parties and international partners directed to strengthen the implementation of its provisions in all their aspects. In particular, supporting the humanitarian goal of the Convention, we advocate for sustainable assistance to the victims of cluster munitions.

Another key priority and goal that we share is that of having a peaceful and safe world without nuclear weapons. In this regard, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty lays the foundation for these principles. We are hoping that the outcome of the tenth Review Conference is a successful one.

Moreover, we recognize the importance of the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START for five years, as we consider this Treaty crucial to European and international security and an important contribution to confidence-building, transparency and risk reduction.

In the same vein, we firmly believe that the proliferation of the use of chemical and biological weapons, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons, by State or non-State actors, is unacceptable.

The issue of effectively ensuring the participation of women in decision-making processes related to disarmament, peace and security requires our common efforts, as stated in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). We call upon all members and non-members to fully engage in promoting its principles.

Mr. President, to conclude, I would like to underscore that the Republic of Moldova fully shares the values of the Conference on Disarmament and its goals to create a world free of nuclear weapons, and we have thus aligned ourselves with the opening statement made by the European Union in January. We strongly believe in the principles of conflict prevention, and to succeed in this, we need political will, continuous cooperation and mutual trust. My country has always pleaded for an enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament, which we think would contribute to further spreading and strengthening its values. Thank you.

The President: I thank the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia.

Mr. Rinkēvičs (Latvia): Mr. President, I would like to express Latvia's full support and cooperation.

Despite last year's headlines being so concentrated on the COVID-19 pandemic, international hostile-minded actors are not inactive even if they do not make the headlines. We have plenty of examples that inaction or lack of progress on our part means further encouragement of actions contrary to our common values.

One of the most striking examples highlighting our errors of omission was the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny. Such despicable acts are a strong reminder that not all actors observe the Chemical Weapons Convention. Their behaviour poses a serious threat to the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime. We commend efforts by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Technical Secretariat to competently and professionally investigate such cases. The international community has been increasingly vocal in demanding an answer to these threats. And much more action is needed.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last year. It is the cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It is also the most effective tool for countering the existential threat of nuclear weapons. The NPT Review Conference has been repeatedly delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

However, with the considerable challenges we face, we must make sure that these delays do not impact our commitment. Those challenges are growing. They range from worrying actions by Iran in breach of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to the growing nuclear arsenal of the North Korean regime.

I must also mention the humanitarian consequences stemming from the use of conventional weapons in conflicts and violence around the globe. Armed clashes have continued throughout the pandemic, and each lost life has been one loss too many. Some international instruments for transparency and confidence have suffered setbacks, such as the Open Skies Treaty. Others, like the Vienna Document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, are often followed in letter but not in spirit. Those international norms need to be fully observed and respected. We encourage constant attention to this issue.

It is not easy to begin anew and rise to the occasion. But these examples are evidence of the need for constructive engagement. I believe that this moment is well suited for such action. We are making progress in the fight against the pandemic. We are multiplying our efforts to address climate change. This trend should continue in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. The starting impulse has already been given. The United States and Russia have extended the New START for another five years, allowing us to broaden our focus and increase our ambitions.

This was a welcome move. However, the most promising aspect of this recent agreement has been the idea of further talks on arms control, including with other States. Without progress, there is stagnation, and in disarmament and non-proliferation this maxim holds true. We must engage proactively and prepare for the future today. We should not simply react to challenges. We need to actually develop a system that eliminates them or is strong enough to respond to them on its own.

The NPT Review Conference offers the opportunity to be proactive, imaginative and even bold. We need to continue taking constructive paths forward, such as implementing the action plan agreed at the 2010 Review Conference. But we should also pursue substantive avenues for progress. These might include increased coordination among the five permanent members of the Security Council, new approaches to verification and transparency or innovative ideas about strengthening the global non-proliferation regime.

It is also important to continue future-oriented efforts in accordance with our obligations and existing goals. The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is important. And so are immediate and substantive negotiations in the Conference on a fissile material cut-off treaty. However, these targets remain elusive. Their ongoing elusiveness is proof that our cooperation must be improved.

Furthermore, we have to change our approach and evolve. Our view must be broad yet constructive. We need to fully fund, universalize and support the conventions negotiated in this Conference. And we need to work on a range of other issues and new areas of engagement. For example, emerging and disruptive technologies.

Last year, I spoke about the danger of falling into the trap of low ambitions and a permanent status quo saddled with growing bureaucratic issues. This is the primary reason why here today I am advocating proactive engagement and future-oriented thinking.

For arms control and disarmament to be effective, all parties need to abide by the rules. However, to counter malicious actors, we have to further develop these rules. We need to strengthen them and prepare them for turbulent and unpredictable times.

I encourage the Conference to utilize its historic combination of diplomatic effort and political will. Its effectiveness has to be renewed and the membership of the Conference has to be expanded. Universalization is crucial if we are to talk of progress and a role for this forum in engaging with issues of the future.

Mr. President, the return to effectiveness for the Conference is no longer a wish or a hope. It is now a question of necessity. Let us begin the work. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Dr. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Hammadi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar.

Mr. Al Hammadi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, Excellencies, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament Tatiana Valovaya, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to join you today at this important meeting. We hope that the work of this year's Conference will be crowned with success and will advance the process of creating a world free of nuclear weapons. The global cooperation and solidarity shown in confronting the COVID-19 pandemic and the many challenges that have resulted from it for the whole world is a model for continuing the multilateral approach to the issue of nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, disarmament is essentially a humanitarian issue related to the protection of people. It plays a crucial role in preventing armed crises and conflicts and contributes to resolving them through serious political dialogue and negotiations rather than the use of weapons. Therefore, it is considered not simply an option but rather a necessity, the results of which benefit everyone and contribute to building a safer and more secure world.

Unfortunately, weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons remain a major concern for humanity and threaten international peace and security and sustainable development, requiring the international community to pay increasing attention to disarmament issues, preserve existing achievements, identify areas where progress can be made and seek compromise solutions. In this regard, we welcome the agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation to extend the validity of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START), a positive step towards reducing and eliminating the nuclear arms cycle.

Qatar pursues a consistent and clear national policy on disarmament issues, based on its commitment to fulfilling its responsibilities to maintaining international peace and security and its belief in the need to support all disarmament efforts around the world. As a result, Qatar has acceded to many major international agreements in the field of disarmament. The National Committee for the Prohibition of Weapons was established in 2004 and plays an important role in advising the relevant government agencies, participating in the development and modernization of national legislation related to weapons of mass destruction and working to achieve the objectives of the relevant international conventions to which Qatar is a party. It also prepares and implements programmes to raise awareness of various aspects of disarmament, organizes training courses in cooperation with the Doha Regional Centre for Training on the Conventions on Weapons of Mass Destruction and relevant international organizations and hosts numerous conferences and seminars on topics related to disarmament.

The Middle East is facing an important security dilemma characterized by the existence and use of weapons of mass destruction, which constitutes a real threat that must be addressed. The initiatives to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are among the important attempts to address these concerns at the regional and international levels. Their success will contribute to achieving security, stability, peace and sustainable development, as well as enhancing the credibility of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), especially in the light of existing regional and international tensions.

In this regard, Qatar expresses its full support for holding a new session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction this year. It also looks forward to the tenth NPT Review Conference in April 2021. We also call on the international community, particularly the sponsors of the 1995 resolution, which was mainly related to the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to fulfil its responsibilities and duties in implementing the resolutions of the 2010 Review Conference and other relevant resolutions.

Qatar also affirms the legitimate right of all countries, particularly developing countries, to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, in accordance with the standards and procedures of the International Atomic Energy Agency and under its supervision, and also in accordance with the comprehensive safeguards system.

Mr. President, Qatar believes in the importance of the Conference on Disarmament as the only multilateral negotiating forum to discuss disarmament issues. We call on all member States to show flexibility and political will in order to end the stalemate in the Conference and to reach a balanced and comprehensive programme of work that takes into account the security concerns of all States and is in line with the rules of procedure.

We also stress that it is time for the Conference on Disarmament to consider expanding its membership to be more representative, in line with the rules of procedure. In this regard, Qatar reaffirms its desire to join the Conference on Disarmament as a member. The membership application was sent to the secretariat of the Conference in June 2012. We hope that there will be real progress on this matter.

In conclusion, Qatar affirms its commitment to supporting disarmament negotiations, implementing all its obligations in this area and maintaining its positions and ongoing calls to maintain international peace and security and protect humanity from the devastating effects of lethal weapons. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar.

Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes our business for today. The next meeting of the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament will take place tomorrow, Wednesday, 24 February, at 10 a.m. Central European Time, on the same virtual platform. The high-level segment will conclude with another meeting tomorrow afternoon.

A list of speakers for tomorrow will be shared with you this afternoon and will also be available on the website of the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.