

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Friday, 12 March 2021, at 10 a.m., Central European Summer Time

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

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The President: Good morning, distinguished colleagues. I have a very short list of speakers this morning and would like to begin by giving the floor to the Ambassador of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohammed (Sudan): Mr. President, please allow me to express my thanks and the appreciation of the Government of Sudan to all members of this distinguished forum for having accepted my country's request to join this august body as an observer. We participated in the work of the Conference last year as well and will continue to engage in its important work.

As you may be aware, Sudan is currently undergoing major and serious political transformation following the popular revolution of December 2018 that called for freedom, peace and justice. The civilian-led transitional government is determined to make fundamental positive changes in the country. Achieving these has been its priority. And on 3 October 2020, in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, a historic peace agreement was signed with the Sudan Revolutionary Front and the Sudan Liberation Movement; and negotiations are ongoing to include the remaining factions, so as to have an inclusive peace process. Representatives of those signatories of the peace agreement have been able to join the recently formed cabinet.

Mr. President, the transitional Government is committed to opening humanitarian corridors through disarmament and will continue to exert all possible efforts to achieve development in the areas affected by war in the past.

Cognizant of its role in contributing to achieving peace and security, Sudan had the honour last year to preside over the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. It was a difficult and challenging year, yet Sudan managed to advance the work, despite all the obstacles, through to a successful conclusion of the eighteenth Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

In this connection, I would like to thank all the members who assisted Sudan in concluding this very important milestone after the Oslo Action Plan that was adopted in 2018. Let me also thank the secretariat of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention for its good work in this regard.

On 22 July 2020, Sudan signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, a further step forward in my country's efforts towards disarmament. At the regional level, Sudan is collaborating with Chad in the clearance of landmines in the border areas; the relevant authorities are working now on an agreement that is to be finalized very soon.

In closing, Mr. President, let me reiterate our commitment to continue to engage in this forum and contribute to the noble values of preserving peace and security in our region and beyond.

The President: I thank very much the distinguished Ambassador for bringing to the attention of the Conference the efforts of the Sudan in the fields of peace and disarmament. I now give the floor to the distinguished delegate of Algeria.

Mr. Soualem (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, it is a pleasure to see your friendly country at the helm of the Conference on Disarmament, as it has carried out this work in outstanding fashion, reflecting the commitment of Brazil to disarmament forums. My delegation takes this opportunity to congratulate you on your successful presidency of the Conference and to express our sincere gratitude for your kind words to my country during the opening meeting of your presidency. The Conference remembers well your country's valuable contribution to its work, as well as the remarkable consolidation of efforts between our two countries in this forum, as demonstrated by your predecessor, Ambassador Macedo Soares, when it came to the Brazilian position in support of the programme of work approved under the Algerian presidency in 2009. That position did not need much explanation, as the draft reflected the proposal made by Brazil 10 years earlier during the presidency of the Ambassador of Brazil to Conference at that time, Mr. Celso Amorim.

As we recall this honourable past, I would like to quote what Ambassador Macedo Soares said to the late Algerian Ambassador Jazaïry, President of the Conference, in 2009: "You have, among other qualities, the gift of clarity, and I think – at least it is my belief –

that those who have bad ideas are never clear.” This is completely true of you, with the dedication, conscientiousness and selflessness you have shown in performing your tasks, which are unmatched.

Mr. President, as we meet today at the tenth meeting under your presidency, not to mention the active consultations you have conducted, we would like to commend you and the members of your delegation for your tremendous efforts and the spirit of perseverance, patience and open-mindedness you have shown through an approach based on teamwork and meaningful, constructive, inclusive and transparent dialogue, which is an additional building block for reaching a consensus within the Conference.

Mr. President, your presidency and the five other presidencies that have supported you have done their duty and provided the Conference with the elements needed for success, which would have been achieved if the members of this Conference had taken this additional opportunity by demonstrating the necessary political will, a precondition for any progress in the work of the Conference, as Algeria has reiterated since the opening session of the Conference in 1979. You should therefore feel that you have fulfilled your duties, as you have carried out your work responsibly and professionally and spared no effort in serving the Conference. However, the keys to the Conference’s success remain in the hands of the member States.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I would like to reiterate my country’s readiness to work with the future presidencies to advance our work and to sincerely thank the members of the secretariat for their commendable and appreciated efforts.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Algeria for the kind words addressed to this presidency and also for the kind references to joint past and present Brazilian and Algerian participation in this Conference. Our bilateral relations with Algeria are old and solid. I myself had the pleasure at the beginning of my professional work to serve as a young secretary in Algiers, and I will say that it was a happy time in my life.

I now recognize the Ambassador of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Mr. President, I just came across a BBC article about the applications sought by the Japanese billionaire, Mr. Yusaku Maezawa, for eight members of the public to join him for a trip around the moon on a SpaceX flight in 2023, for which he will be paying fully. According to the article, he requires the applicants to meet two criteria. These are – and I quote from the article – that the applicants should advance whatever activity they are in to help other people and greater society in some way. And the second criterion is that they should be willing to support other crew members who share similar aspirations.

When I looked at the first criterion, it occurred to me that all the members of the Conference on Disarmament, observers and candidates for observer status are fully qualified for the flight on that basis. However, the second criterion has got me thinking about whether we would actually qualify. Despite the human efforts undertaken by you, Mr. President, the show of support is still eluding us. However, that does not undermine the value of the work undertaken by you and your delegation. You have discharged your mandate with great elegance and grace, and India would like to pay tribute to you for the way you have tried to advance our work and reach consensus.

As I mentioned earlier, we saw the best of ambiances under your presidency, thanks to your inclusive and transparent approach. Regrettably, the Conference on Disarmament is not yet ready to overcome divergences and we hope that we will be able to do so in the coming weeks.

Mr. President, it is logical and sound multilateral practice to reference, and base our work on, earlier work. In this framework, the work carried out by the subsidiary bodies in 2018 is the latest successful work that this Conference has conducted and certainly needs to be referenced and given primacy. We wish to build on that work without prejudice to any proposals, past, present and future.

I would also like to make a point for the record: dissent or disagreement with the proposal or approach of any member or presidency does not mean disrespect. Healthy disagreements are the hallmark of vibrant and democratic bodies and democratic societies,

and they only strengthen multilateral efforts. We treat proposals by fellow colleagues and the presidency in the same spirit and shall continue to do so.

We look forward to working with you in your capacity as a member of the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session and as Brazil, with which India enjoys close bilateral relations, to reach consensus and advance our work.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of India. You have reminded me of a very famous line in Spanish literature by the poet Jorge Manrique, who said that “the past was a better time”. Perhaps we should, as you say, look back to past occasions when this Conference managed to accomplish something, to see if we can apply what worked then to make things work today.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, at the informal meeting you chaired yesterday afternoon, I already expressed our delegation’s profound appreciation of and heartfelt gratitude for your efforts during your presidency of the Conference. Today, in this official plenary meeting of Conference, I think it necessary to reiterate those thanks so that the secretariat can put them on record.

I very much agree with the views expressed by my colleagues just now. Their words represent the thinking of many of us in the Conference. Like your predecessor, the Belgian Ambassador, you encouraged and guided all parties towards reaching a decision on the programme of work of this year’s session. In this process, the respect you have shown for the concerns and positions of each member State, your patience and your tireless efforts in advancing the drafting process are precisely what was needed in the rotating presidency. We once again express our heartfelt thanks for this.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our delegation’s desire to continue to cooperate fully with your successors and fully support their work. I also believe that the Conference membership will, in the spirit of the serious nature of the Conference’s work and our responsibility for it, make full use of this year’s meeting time to carry out substantive work around the important items on the Conference’s agenda.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China, for both his formal and his informal words kindly addressed to the presidency. I now give the floor to the delegate of Egypt.

Mr. Elsayed (Egypt): Mr. President, please allow me to start by thanking you and your team for the extensive and inclusive consultations that you have been conducting for the past few weeks and to thank the secretariat for all its efforts in supporting your presidency and the work of the Conference. The transparent, inclusive and non-discriminatory manner in which we have been conducting our work, Mr. President, cannot be questioned.

I would also like to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the delegation of Sudan and to commend it for its interest in participating in the work of the Conference on Disarmament as observers. We look forward to working with it and other delegations to advance the work of the Conference.

Mr. President, during the past few weeks, my delegation has been listening very carefully to the discussions in the Conference; although we attach the greatest importance to the Conference’s work, we intentionally refrained from making proposals or suggestions that could complicate things further, as we fully recognized the difficulties that the Conference has been facing. We are also committed to the purposes and objectives of multilateral disarmament machinery, with the Conference at its heart.

Nuclear disarmament is the reason for the Conference; the Conference is mandated to commence negotiations on this long-standing issue but, even though Egypt, like the majority of member States of the Conference, attaches the highest importance to this issue, we did not try to take the Conference hostage to what is justifiably the core issue of its work. We upheld the concepts of constructiveness and collective action and decided to exercise maximum flexibility to allow the Conference on Disarmament to assume its work, although we were not entirely comfortable with many of the proposals on the table.

Mr. President, since the beginning of this year's session, we have been supportive to the various proposals presented by the Belgian presidency and your presidency. Along the way, we have constructively engaged in efforts to make them acceptable for everyone. Although the latest proposal, presented yesterday, was not perfect, we were ready to adopt it as it was a result of transparent and inclusive process.

I wish to highlight the fact that we are merely trying to reach an agreement on adopting a decision that will allow us to establish subsidiary bodies to be able to conduct our work on the items on the Conference's agenda. However, the process in which we were involved was revealing in many ways, and the silent majority in the room proved to be the most constructive in this process. At this critical juncture, it is imperative to remind ourselves that the impasse in the Conference on Disarmament is not acceptable nor sustained.

Mr. President, I would like once again to reiterate my delegation's sincere appreciation for all the efforts and for the transparent and professional manner in which you have led our work and to take this chance to welcome the representative of Bulgaria, the incoming President of the Conference, and assure him of our full support.

The President: I thank the delegate of Egypt and give the floor to the delegate of Mexico.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, the delegation of Mexico sincerely acknowledges your hard work and strenuous efforts to reach decisions on the organization of the Conference's work during your presidency. There is no doubt that you and your entire team have demonstrated responsibility, commitment and transparency in the way that you have conducted your work.

We also want to recognize once again the close and efficient collaboration that we continue to see among the six presidencies. This is proving to be a good practice that we hope will be maintained to give some continuity to the work, which would be of great benefit to the Conference.

When the decision contained in document CD/2119 was adopted, my delegation stated that we still had concerns and that we would judge the usefulness of the subsidiary bodies once they had completed their work. Many of those concerns remain.

At the same time, we are not unsympathetic to all those delegations that found the exercise useful, as we have indicated in our responses to the draft decisions proposed by the United Kingdom, Algeria and Belgium and the one you yourself proposed, particularly in view of the complexities of the prevailing international security climate and the need to make at least some tangible progress in the field of disarmament.

What we are certain of is that there is a need to refine the mandate of the subsidiary bodies in recognition of the fact that they should not simply repeat the pattern of deliberation that duplicates the mandate of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. The new mandate must be adjusted to take into account what happened in 2018, without leaving aside other documents adopted by the Conference that we believe are still relevant. Over the past two years, efforts have been made to strengthen the mandate so that, although it does not include the beginning of actual negotiations, it is at least geared towards making recommendations in that direction. For us, this would be the most valuable aspect of the adoption of a decision this year.

My delegation will certainly continue to engage constructively and substantively in further deliberations in accordance with the principles of multilateral diplomacy, with a focus on fulfilling the Conference's negotiating mandate.

Once again, Mr. President, I sincerely acknowledge the work done during your presidency, which reinforces the role of Brazil in disarmament issues. In a spirit of multilateralism, transparency and consensus-building, you have sought to move towards a more peaceful world and the elimination of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the distinguished delegate of Mexico for his kind words, and I also thank the delegation of Mexico for all its support and its very

objective and in-depth contributions during the consultations we have needed to hold in our attempts to reach a consensus document on the work of the Conference.

(spoke in English)

I have the honour to give the floor to the delegate of South Africa.

Mr. September (South Africa): On behalf of the South African delegation, I would like to commend you, Mr. President, for your sterling efforts in trying to get the Conference on Disarmament back on track. I would also like to thank you for the professional and transparent way in which you and your staff have conducted yourselves. Furthermore, I would like to express our appreciation to the other members of the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session, together with the last President of the 2020 session and the first of the 2022 session, and the Conference on Disarmament secretariat.

South Africa is committed to a functioning Conference on Disarmament. It is therefore regrettable that, even though we have a body that is mandated to negotiate multilateral disarmament instruments, it has not discharged its basic mandate for almost a quarter of a century.

We appreciate the statement made by Sudan earlier this morning. We all have to do our part to ensure an Africa that is at peace with itself.

Mr. President, as members gather here in the Conference on Disarmament, we are bound by our collective commitment to advance substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament. My delegation will continue our efforts to seek a meaningful mandate to deliver on that promise, in the expectation that the Conference on Disarmament will deliver on its responsibility as the single multilateral negotiating forum.

While the primary responsibility for taking the necessary steps towards the elimination of nuclear weapons lies with the nuclear weapon States, all of us must play our part in achieving our common goal. It is therefore incumbent upon all States to engage, without further delay, in an accelerated process of negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control, with a meaningful mandate under a programme of work in the Conference on Disarmament as the point of departure.

The adoption of a decision on the work of the Conference is not a programme of work. This was confirmed in the Conference's 2018 resolution. As we have stated so many times before, repeating the activities of the past has not brought the Conference closer to any agreement on a programme of work.

Nevertheless, it is our hope that any decision taken this year will not distract the Conference on Disarmament from the imperative of reaching a consensus on a programme of work and starting negotiations, and will also lay a foundation on which the Conference on Disarmament can make progress. We are flexible and will support the incoming President in trying to make progress.

Mr. President, in conclusion, your efforts in urging the Conference in that direction are greatly appreciated. Brazil can walk tall – the Brazilian presidency did not fail. On the contrary, it is the Conference on Disarmament members who failed to even agree on a decision with a discussion mandate.

The President: I thank the delegate of South Africa very much for the kind words addressed to this presidency and also for his evaluation of the worldwide importance of the Conference on Disarmament which we, Brazil, share completely.

I now give the floor to the delegate of Colombia.

Ms. Castillo Castro (Colombia) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Mr. President, my delegation would like to thank you and your team for all your efforts over the past four weeks. We appreciate your tireless willingness to work to reach a basic agreement that would make it possible to organize the work of the Conference for the current session.

My delegation has observed with concern the difficulties that have arisen during your presidency, especially those that prevent us from building on documents and processes that all States parties have agreed by consensus in the past. Our mandate is ambitious and complex but, without the good will of all States parties, without willingness to work in multi-year processes and, above all, without any interest in finding a middle ground from which to move forward, the Conference will lose all its relevance.

Again, I thank you, Ambassador, for your commitment to this course of action, and we hope that during the next presidency we will be able to find ways to organize our work for the remainder of the current session.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the delegation of Colombia for those kind words and, above all, for its support throughout our work.

(*spoke in English*)

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to pay high tribute to your unwavering and commendable efforts, which led us very close to a consensus on the two draft decisions to frame our work. I also pay tribute to the professionalism and the ingenuity which you and your team showed with your excellent work on these two documents. Your way of presiding our work during your mandate was clearly marked by inclusiveness, fairness, a sensible balance and transparency. I believe that these qualities of yours contributed a lot to improving the quality and atmosphere of the work of this august body.

And even though we were not able to reach a consensus on these very important documents, your efforts, as well as our efforts orchestrated by you, were well rewarded by the spirit of cooperation and flexibility shown by many of the members of this august body, which contributed a lot to further improving its substantive work.

I would also like to welcome the distinguished representative of Sudan as an observer. Your participation in this body will contribute a lot to enriching the discussions on this work.

I would also like to express our commitment to continue to engage constructively in the substantive work under the incoming presidency. The work of the Conference on Disarmament is of great value and we are at a very important juncture, especially with the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, so we would like to do our best to further advance the substantive work of the Conference under the incoming presidency.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan, not only for the kind words addressed to the presidency, but also for the cooperation that his delegation has shown during the negotiations under this presidency.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Mr. President, let me first commend you and your team on the extraordinary efforts that you all have made to try to find consensus on a programme of work. You have done a tremendous job in trying to find the sweet spot of consensus which, as we all know, has been extremely difficult to come by during the past two decades or so.

To those who call for commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament, some very sincerely, others insincerely: it should be very clear by now that getting to the heart of the Conference on Disarmament's mandate, that is, negotiations, is a long way off. It is not going to happen anytime soon.

We have clearly reached an inflection point in the Conference on Disarmament. And normally, under such circumstances in other bodies, where this kind of an inflection point is reached, we would start to think about how to jump-start activity in the body concerned, which would mean having a discussion about how to do our business better, so that we could achieve productive results.

We cannot even have that kind of a discussion in the Conference on Disarmament, given all the opposition we have seen in the past to just having a type of engagement on how

the Conference on Disarmament can better conduct its business. This fact, that we cannot even agree to hold a discussion about how to conduct our work, does not augur well for this body in the future.

So what we need to do is to be very honest and ask ourselves what the path forward for this body is, if any. The problem with this body is that we get in the habit of exchanging diplomatic platitudes to cover up for the fact that there is no political will to do anything. Some of us hold up the idea of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work to ensure that nothing ever gets done.

So I will have to report to my capital once again that we have not been able to come to consensus on even the basic elements of a programme of work based on a discussion mandate. This will be nothing new for my capital, as I am sure is true for many other capitals represented in the Conference on Disarmament.

But we have to ask ourselves again, do we really want to make progress in this body? And if we do, we need to have a very serious discussion about how we get this body moving forward. If we continue to go through the same old warm platitudes about everybody's commitment to multilateral negotiations and reaching agreement to begin negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament, we are deceiving ourselves.

So my appeal to the incoming president is that we abandon this current effort to obtain a programme of work based on the draft that the Brazilian team tried to move forward, and try another path, another way forward. While we were very happy to support these two documents, it is clear we are not going to make any progress going forward. So again colleagues, please give it very serious thought: do we really want to try to do something with this body or not?

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States for his kind words to the presidency and also for having shown general flexibility towards obtaining consensus on very difficult aspects of our discussions. And I also thank the Ambassador for this last, very clear evaluation of the possibilities for the work of the Conference on Disarmament in the future.

I now give the floor to the distinguished delegate from the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Distinguished colleagues, I would like to echo the gratitude expressed to the Brazilian presidency by the delegates who have spoken before me. The Brazilian presidency and you personally, Mr. President, together with your team, in close cooperation with the other Presidents of the current session and the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament, have done a huge amount of painstaking work. Your approach to the President's duties has been distinguished by a clear vision of the aims and objectives of any presidency at this stage of the Conference's work. Your team has also demonstrated a clear understanding of the concepts of compromise and consensus. Thanks to your efforts to find compromise on draft decisions, I think that we managed to move some way towards consensus. I agree with other speakers that it is not your fault that we could not achieve the desired result during your leadership of the Conference.

I believe it would be no exaggeration to say that your work as President could be seen as a model of multilateral diplomacy. You are leaving a substantial legacy, which I hope will be called upon by the next presidency and taken as a basis for our future attempts to make a decision on the organization of the Conference's substantive work during the current session.

The situation in the Conference is once again gradually coming to an impasse. Here I would like to speak in solidarity with Ambassador Wood and say that we must all make efforts to change that situation so that we can finally begin the substantive work of the Conference. Unfortunately, no one can help us with this. It is imperative that we find some fresh new ideas so to agree on a unified approach and a common understanding of the results we want to achieve during the current session and, subsequently, in the short, medium and long term.

We could continue – if you'll excuse me for using the word – quibbling and keep trying to refine the document with our national positions, but I think that our main point of reference for our work here at the Conference should, as Ambassador Wood rightly said, be productive results. We all have the same goals of not merely fulfilling a mandate or adopting

a programme of work, but achieving tangible results, which the international community can see as our contribution, the shared contribution of the Conference, to international security, of which arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation remain a vitally important part.

I would like to wish the Bulgarian President success in his work and assure him of the Russian delegation's full support for his efforts to achieve the goal of beginning substantive work at the Conference.

I would also like to welcome the delegation of the Sudan, which has been granted observer status at our forum and express my hope that the issue we encountered at the start of this session, namely the blocking of requests for observer status from a number of countries, will finally be resolved and will not overshadow the work of our forum.

The President: I thank the Russian delegation for having being among those that tried to help constructively throughout the process of trying to arrive somewhere, which we unfortunately did not achieve.

I give the floor to the Ambassador of Switzerland.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, please allow me to take the floor to express our gratitude for the way in which you have performed your tasks as President of our Conference. Your commitment and good will in particular have been exemplary, and I would especially like to thank you for all your efforts to achieve the adoption of a decision that would have enabled us to establish subsidiary bodies on all the items on the Conference's agenda. We are, of course, fully aware of the difficulty of getting such a decision adopted, given the conflicting viewpoints of the members of the Conference, as evidenced in our debates this week. My delegation remains convinced that this is the most realistic approach for the Conference at this time, a pragmatic approach that would allow us to move forward on substance and at the same time bring us closer to beginning negotiations. Should the Conference not be in a position to take such a decision, which we would of course deeply regret, we will then need to take swift action to determine how the Conference intends to structure its work for the remainder of the 2021 session, including with regard to addressing the most pressing substantive issues. That being said, my delegation has full confidence that the collegiate presidency and the upcoming Bulgarian presidency will guide us in meeting this challenge.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Switzerland for the kind words addressed to the presidency and for his observations on the possible future of this Conference.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I give the floor to the distinguished delegate of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, my delegation would like to express its appreciation and gratitude for the work you and your team have done during your presidency. You have worked in a professional, transparent and, above all, patient manner to try to achieve the adoption of a document that would enable us to begin work on the substantive issues of the Conference.

My delegation regrets that your tireless work and efforts have not succeeded in ending the paralysis that sadly characterizes the Conference. However, I would like to emphasize that, thanks to your professionalism, we have come very close to consensus many times. We believe that this was possible only because of the excellent atmosphere that you have been able to cultivate. We agree with other delegations that our inability to adopt a document that would allow us to begin our work had nothing to do with your excellent performance. On the contrary, it is purely the result of the prevailing situation in the Conference which appears to be increasingly difficult to change.

Like my own country, Brazil has a long and successful history in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and in that spirit, your delegation has done its utmost to breathe new life into the Conference. In all the disarmament forums, your delegation has demonstrated its professionalism and its willingness to make progress in nuclear and conventional disarmament, in good faith and while respecting multilateralism.

The Brazilian presidency of the Conference has been no exception. We hope that during the next presidency we will be able to make further progress under the leadership of Bulgaria, especially now that the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference is approaching, and the work of our Conference on Disarmament will undoubtedly feed into the negotiations in New York.

In this regard, my delegation would like to wish the new Bulgarian presidency every success and to thank you once again for your excellent work.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much to the delegation of Argentina for the kind words addressed to the Brazilian presidency, and thank you also, above all, for the opportunity to present jointly to this Conference a very positive experience, namely the agreement between Brazil and Argentina aimed at building mutual trust in the field of nuclear development.

(*spoke in English*)

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

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, I would like to join previous speakers in expressing my appreciation for your patience, inclusiveness and tireless efforts to build consensus, despite our different views and perspectives. My sincere appreciation also goes to your team and the secretariat.

Mr. President, it is indeed regrettable that we have not been able to adopt decisions on the work of the Conference on Disarmament this year, after so many formal and informal meetings over the past four weeks. I believe that many delegations, including my own, have demonstrated flexibility, but it is still a bitter reality that we have not been able to reach a consensus. However, we should not be overly pessimistic and do nothing. It is maybe time to consider collectively how we can best use our resources and time during the remainder of this year's session. We believe that it would be advisable to have the wisdom to do so by contributing to progress on important issues on the Conference's agenda. Well planned thematic discussions on this body's core issues would be of great value in terms of fostering mutual understanding among members and reviving the spirit of trust and cooperation in the Conference on Disarmament. By doing so, I hope that we can move forward together.

Lastly, I wish success for the incoming presidency of Bulgaria, and assure it of my delegation's cooperation and support.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his words and for his support to the work of this presidency. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Mr. President, I would like to join other delegations in commending you on your hard work, your perseverance and the professionalism that you and your team have demonstrated. We appreciate the transparent manner in which you have tried to bridge the gaps that unfortunately continue to exist.

We all know where we are. It is unfortunate, but that is behind us. I think we agree with some of the observations made by Ambassador Wood, who focused on primarily on what is happening. It may be a function of the times that we live in, but I think that we all agree that we have reached a point, an inflection point. I believe that we need to have some very frank conversations that cannot focus only on what is happening; we need to be equally honest in trying to find out and address why is this happening.

We have drawn attention to a number of externalities. As we have always said, the Conference on Disarmament does not operate in a vacuum. The work we do is affected by what happens outside. And there is a long history, there are different views and these views are not entirely based on conjecture.

We have seen certain developments. There are perceptions of commitments not being honoured. There have been deviations from established principles and rules that were crafted painstakingly over several decades. There are, therefore, a number of factors which are responsible for the impasse that exists in the Conference on Disarmament.

So we need to focus on what is happening, why it is happening and then how we should tackle it, how we can bring the Conference on Disarmament back to at least some kind of discussion – and I agree that we are still very far from even pre-negotiations.

I think that the first step is to have very frank conversations, not necessarily in a structured format. We have this platform, the Conference on Disarmament, and it could be used for more frank conversations.

And the second element is to start building a degree of trust, because we have got to where we are because of erosion of that trust. It will take time to rebuild the trust and the comfort level for all delegations to be able to begin discussions and then move forward.

So I want to thank you again, Mr. President, and would like to also extend our best wishes to the Bulgarian presidency.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan for the words addressed to the presidency and for having been a constant and transparent partner on the path to find a way out of our stalemate. I thank him also for his advice and suggestions. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, we believe that it would be unfair if we failed to appreciate the genuine endeavours that you and your team have made during your short tenure of the Conference on Disarmament presidency. You did all you possibly could to bridge the gap and bring consensus, and you did it professionally and respectfully and in a transparent manner. The Conference on Disarmament could have made a breakthrough under your leadership by agreeing on a relatively balanced and comprehensive programme of work; we all just needed to show a certain level of flexibility and understanding. My delegation did so and that is why we offered our readiness to forego our reservations about a couple of important phrases and concepts, in the sincere hope that the Conference on Disarmament would be able to reach consensus perhaps on the basis of your last, very delicately crafted proposal.

Mr. President, dear colleagues, we regret that the Conference on Disarmament has once again been failed by the deep and entrenched unwillingness of a few to begin genuine engagement and meaningful negotiations for nuclear disarmament. That is, of course truly regrettable and disconcerting. We are frustrated but not disappointed. We share a sense of frustration that is felt by many responsible members that have long invested a lot in this conference as the single multilateral negotiating forum on nuclear disarmament.

But we cannot afford to be disappointed. We need to keep our heads and our spirits up, remain perseverant and build upon various creative solutions that the Brazilian presidency and others have put forward to find a consensual formula on the programme of work. And we are looking forward to working constructively with the upcoming presidency in that direction.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his kind words addressed to the presidency and for the help given to us during our consultation exercises, and I also thank him for his appraisal of the future work of this Conference.

I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Aala (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, I would like to join the colleagues who have spoken before me in expressing our great appreciation for the efforts made by you and your team during the Brazilian presidency and to pay tribute to the spirit of transparency and the inclusive approach that you have taken in managing the extensive and intensive consultations you have held, both bilaterally and more broadly. They have undoubtedly helped to clarify positions and bring us closer to a consensus on documents that would allow the Conference to resume its substantive work.

The two documents submitted by the Brazilian presidency reflect a genuine effort, and, while they may not have been ideal for everyone, there is no doubt that they brought us closer to a consensus. We believe that the adoption of these two documents would have allowed the Conference to begin its substantive work and thus bring us closer to achieving the goal of resuming the work of the Conference in accordance with its negotiating mandate.

My delegation is committed to the mandate of the Conference and to the objectives set out in the final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, but we were prepared to join the consensus on the two documents proposed by the presidency as substantive options that could give the Conference an opportunity to engage in substantive discussions.

Of course, when we began this session, we had no illusions about what could be achieved. Here I agree with my colleague, the Ambassador of Pakistan, that what we can achieve in the Conference is largely affected by what is happening outside the Conference and that we need a consensus on a vision of what we want or hope to achieve in this Conference.

We also agree that what is needed is the political will to move forward and nothing else. In order to achieve this goal, we must – and here again I agree with the Pakistani Ambassador – work to build trust among the members of the Conference. I believe that this task should be the main priority of the next presidencies. We would like to stress that the documents presented by the Brazilian presidency could be a starting point for the talks or consultations on the programme of work during the Bulgarian presidency.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic for the words addressed to the presidency and also for the valuable help he gave us during the process of bilateral consultations.

I do not seem to have any more speakers on my list. So, distinguished delegates, before giving the floor to the Ambassador of Bulgaria, I would ask your indulgence to allow me to say a few words.

I must confess that I really would prefer to hear words of congratulations towards our delegation and all the other members of the group of six Presidents of this session of the Conference on Disarmament for having achieved consensual documents, rather than only for having conducted our negotiations in an acceptable and transparent way. But, at this point of the Brazilian presidency of this Conference on Disarmament, I can only thank all of you again for all the confidence you have placed in our efforts and the efforts of the group of six Presidents and for all the efforts made by each and every delegation together with us on this difficult path towards possible compromise.

I must especially thank those delegations that agreed to have a series of bilateral and multilateral consultations during these past weeks. For the record, we had eight formal plenary meetings, including those of the high-level segment, seven informal plenary meetings, one informal, open-ended consultation and more than a dozen bilateral meetings, in addition to phone calls and video consultations. We maintained the fruitful coordination with the other members of the group of six Presidents: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada and Chile. And I must thank them very much for their constant support. But, unfortunately, all that was not enough.

Unfortunately, we stopped in the middle of the path and we were not able to keep going. However, I sincerely hope that the Bulgarian presidency will be capable of taking us out of this unbelievable labyrinth from next week.

The Belgian presidency did extraordinary work through Ambassador Mark Pecsteen. We then tried our best and we like to believe that the Bulgarian presidency will achieve what we have all been struggling for since the beginning of this 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, you can be assured that the Brazilian delegation, as part of the group of six Presidents, will give all possible support to the work of our next President, Ambassador Sterk of Bulgaria, to whom I wish all success in leading us out of this stalemate.

I sincerely hope that, over the next six months, we will have a more fruitful session of the Conference on Disarmament than the one we had last year. This is what I understand that the world expects from us – something much more than just beautiful speeches.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the Ambassador of Bulgaria, our next President.

Mr. Sterk (Bulgaria): Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, first of all, let me stress that Bulgaria shares the assessment that the past two months have seen another strenuous effort to bring the Conference on Disarmament back on track towards its negotiating mandate. And let me, on behalf of the remaining four Presidents of the 2021 session, express our wholehearted thanks and appreciation of the presidencies of Belgium and Brazil and their team members for their proactive and persistent approach in trying to pave our common way forward.

Bridging the accommodation of national security and other legitimate concerns with possible commonalities, hopefully conducive to future negotiations in the area of disarmament, continues to be a challenging task indeed. The discussions ably guided by the two preceding Presidents have been difficult, often promising and sometimes seemingly close to a successful outcome. And yet we still have not come to an agreement on a common approach.

I listened very carefully to the opinions expressed by previous speakers on this state of affairs and I thank them all for their guidance. We nevertheless believe that we have come a long way and it is worth pursuing the efforts in search of possible solutions a bit further by consulting and trying to identify the decisive commonalities in the proposed text that would allow us to go ahead to achieve the long-aspired-for substantial progress in the Conference's work.

We are ready to go ahead with plenary meetings and consultations in any format in order to take into account any idea which might move us forward. The guiding principle for us would be taking into account all relevant national concerns on an equal footing and not forgetting our primary task of providing for the fulfilment of our negotiating mandate.

Yet we also feel that all the Conference on Disarmament member States are aware that these efforts may very soon reach their limits if national positions do not change to a point of convergence. If we prove unable to overcome the zero-sum game logic, then we will find ourselves compelled to look for alternative ways of fulfilling our task.

We share the view that, if delegations are not ready to go the final mile, it is our prerogative and our duty, as the presidency, to provide for a different path conducive to compliance with the Conference on Disarmament mandate. However, as of now, it is our intention for the first week of the Bulgarian presidency to continue the efforts begun by the Belgian and Brazilian presidencies. Our suggestions for possible topics for thematic debates will follow in due course, depending on the outcome of this shared effort.

In conclusion, let me thank you, Mr. President, and all the delegations that expressed their support and offered their cooperation to the incoming presidency of Bulgaria. I am looking forward to working with all of you in the next several weeks.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Bulgaria. You know you can count on the support of all the members of the group of six Presidents of the 2021 session.

This concludes our business for today. Before closing, I would like once more to thank you all for the support, cooperation, patience and collegiality that I have witnessed.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.