

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and seventy-fourth plenary meeting
Held via videoconference on Friday, 21 May 2021, at 10.10 a.m. Central European Summer Time
President: Mr. Yuri Borissov Sterk (Bulgaria)



The President: I call to order the 1574th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Distinguished colleagues, as this is the final plenary meeting of the Bulgarian presidency, please allow me to make a few concluding remarks.

Time flies, and here we are at the last meeting I have the privilege of presiding over during the Bulgarian presidency. Taking stock, I should start by saying that it has been an honour and an exciting exercise, a challenge and an incomparable experience for me and my team to serve the Conference on Disarmament and facilitate its work in the time of the continuing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Taking over from my colleagues Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve of Belgium and Ambassador Gonçalo de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão of Brazil and their teams, the Bulgarian presidency, as you know, decided to go the extra mile in an effort to help member States arrive at an agreement on the programme of work for this year. It was a sincere and dedicated attempt that lasted two weeks.

Regrettably, following a series of consultations with regional groups and numerous bilateral meetings, it became clear that for yet another year it would not be possible to gain the necessary consensus and allow the Conference on Disarmament to proceed in a structured manner with the fulfilment of its mandate. We, no less than any other delegation in the Conference, deeply deplore this state of affairs. But, after all, diplomacy, like politics, is the art of the possible and in diplomacy, too, the attainable is the art of the next best, as Otto von Bismarck used to say.

So we ultimately decided to opt for the next best. After two months and a half of relentless efforts by three consecutive presidencies to reach an agreement on a programme of work, the Bulgarian presidency, in agreement with the other States members of the group of the five other States that have held or will hold the presidency this year and the membership of the Conference, concluded that the meaningful way of continuing our work for the remainder of the current session would be to launch thematic debates on the items on our agenda.

We therefore started the second half of this year's session of the Conference with thematic debates under agenda items 1 and 2. Informative and insightful presentations by competent, experienced panellists allowed participating delegations not only to share views and make known their positions on the general state of affairs regarding the issues covered by these agenda items but also to have focused discussions on relevant specific topics such as nuclear disarmament verification, nuclear risk reduction and the prospects for negotiating a ban on fissile material for nuclear weapons.

In the course of these thematic debates, we heard restatements of well-known national positions but also evolving interpretations and some new ideas and approaches. In almost all interventions, we also heard about the importance of mutual trust and the need to work for further confidence-building efforts.

It is my conviction that in the absence of an agreed programme of work for the Conference in 2021, discussions and exchanges on all relevant topics, including contentious topics, are, no matter how high the political sensitivity may be, the right way to reach out to each other and to provide for a growing and improved mutual understanding. I also hope that eventually they will allow for sustainable and substantive progress towards fulfilling the mandate of this Conference in the field of nuclear disarmament.

And now, I am happy to hand over the baton to Ambassador Salomon Eheth and his team by wishing them every success for their presidency. Before doing that, however, I will ask if there is any delegation that would like to take the floor.

This is not the case, as I understand it, so I give the floor to Ambassador Eheth.

Mr. Awoumou (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): Good morning, colleagues. As my Ambassador was prevented at the last minute from attending, he has asked me to deliver his remarks. First of all, we address all our customary courtesies to the delegations present. My Ambassador has asked me to commend the Bulgarian President, who is now completing his mandate, for the skill with which he has guided the work of the Conference on Disarmament and steered us towards relevant thematic plenary meetings. My Ambassador has also asked

me to commend the Belgian and Brazilian presidencies, whose substantive work has allowed us to understand that the current context of the Conference called for further thematic discussion, as the President has just pointed out.

I have been asked to confirm that the Cameroonian presidency will follow on from the particularly outstanding Bulgarian presidency. Starting on 1 June 2021, the plenary meetings will cover agenda items 3, 4 and 5, in that order, before finishing with a plenary meeting for general discussion. Then, on 18 June 2022, the baton will be handed over to the delegation of Canada. I should point out that the plenary meeting on 25 May 2021 will serve as an introductory session.

As usual, Mr. Lassina Zerbo will be taking part in the meeting. The delegation of Cameroon has urged Mr. Zerbo not to exceed the formal limits of the briefing traditionally given by the Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization at the Conference.

Invitations to the plenary meeting on 25 May 2021 will of course be sent to all delegations of the member States by the secretariat of the Conference. I can also confirm that the meetings of the group of the six Presidents of the 2021 session, together with the first President of the 2022 session and the last of the 2020 session, and the regional coordinators will go ahead this afternoon as agreed, as Monday, 24 May, is a holiday and these meetings must be held before the plenary meeting. The secretariat will send out the usual invitations and notices.

Mr. President, these were, in a few words, the remarks I was asked to deliver by my Ambassador, who once again offers his apologies, as he has had to deal with some urgent matters. There will, however, be no problems in the future, and he will be in attendance at all meetings starting this afternoon. I thank you for your close attention.

The President: (*spoke in French*) I thank the forthcoming presidency of Cameroon for its kind words for the Bulgarian presidency and wish my Cameroonian colleagues the best of luck. I would also ask you to convey our warm congratulations to Ambassador Eheth. We wish the Cameroonian presidency every success.

(*spoke in English*)

I would now like to give delegations wishing to take the floor the opportunity to do so. The first speaker on my list is the Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Good morning to colleagues.

I just wanted to take the floor to commend you, as you conclude your presidency, for all the efforts that you made, your outreach and your very skilful handling of the work of the Conference on Disarmament. You rightly pointed out that diplomacy is the art of the possible and did all you could to steer the work in the best manner possible.

We also want to take this opportunity to recognize the efforts made by the previous presidencies, which were held by Belgium and Brazil. We look forward to working with the upcoming presidency of Cameroon and hope to continue contributing to the thematic discussions that the Conference is holding. I thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Pakistan for his statement and now give the floor to the next speaker, the Ambassador of Chile Mr. Frank Tressler Zamorano.

Mr. Tressler Zamorano (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, allow me to thank the Bulgarian presidency and especially its Ambassador for his commendable efforts to achieve the sought-after consensus that has proved so elusive.

We understand that we are subject to the consensus rule and, of course, the reality of what is possible, as you mentioned. However, this does not mean that we should not be concerned by the current state of affairs at the Conference on Disarmament. Sooner rather than later, we will have to assume our responsibility and duty to work for peace and security and, accordingly, for a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

To conclude, I, too, would like to thank the presidencies of Belgium and Brazil for their efforts and work towards achieving the aims and objectives we are all pursuing, and to convey my best wishes to Cameroon as it assumes the presidency. The Ambassador of Cameroon can count on our support in his future work. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Chile for his statement. It goes without saying that I am wishing all success and the best of luck also to the presidencies in the group of the year's six Presidents that are subsequent to that of Cameroon – that is, the presidencies of Canada and Chile. The next speaker on my list is the delegate for China.

Mr. Ji Zhaoyu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, Ambassador Li Song was unable to attend today's plenary meeting owing to other engagements. He has asked me to express our appreciation and gratitude to you and your team for your efforts in organizing relevant thematic discussions during this presidency.

The relevant thematic discussions have shown that, although the Conference on Disarmament failed to reach an agreement on a programme of work this year, member States attached great importance to the thematic discussions and actively took part in them. This in itself represents an important effort on the part of all parties to promote the substantive work of the Conference.

At the same time, the Chinese delegation would like to congratulate Cameroon on its assumption of the presidency. We will continue to actively support and participate in the follow-up thematic discussions organized by the future Presidents of the Conference, and we are committed to working with the entire membership of the Conference to advance its work. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of China for his statement. Are there other delegations wishing to take the floor?

I understand this is not the case. And this brings us to the end of our meeting, but before concluding, I must thank all of you, all delegations, for your cooperation and participation in the work of the Conference on Disarmament during the Bulgarian presidency. I am also grateful to our panellists for their valuable contributions and wish to thank the secretariat of the Conference for its indispensable and essential support, our interpreters for their hard work, flexibility and availability, the technical team that made possible our virtual meetings in a reliable and efficient way and, not least, my own team, which is essentially my colleague Iassen, who sits next to me and whose commitment, dedication and tireless efforts were of great help.

I thank you again for your participation. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.