

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and eighty-third plenary meeting
Held via videoconference on Friday, 18 June 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Summer Time
President: Mr. Salomon Eheth(Cameroon)



The President: Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I call to order the 1583rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to turn to the topic of discussion today, the last day of the presidency of Cameroon.

I suggest that we proceed as follows: first, a discussion on the possibility of resuming meeting in person, as requested by the Group of 21; second, the concluding remarks of the Cameroonian presidency; and, finally, the remarks of the incoming Canadian presidency.

I now open the floor to any delegation that wishes to take the floor. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Chile.

Mr. Tressler Zamorano (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, please accept my apologies for taking the floor at this point in time, but I have to leave later to chair a meeting at the International Labour Organization. Therefore, I have only a few minutes to be with you.

As for the first item on the agenda – the need to resume meeting in person – my delegation is of the view that this should not pose any major problems so long as we comply with the rules on the number of persons and distance applicable in Switzerland. We believe that it is important to return to meeting in person whenever possible and to the extent permitted under the local health regulations.

Since this is my first time taking the floor, I would like to extend my greetings to you and your team and congratulate you on your presidency and commend you for your very able steering of the thematic debates, which has demonstrated your experience. Conducting this kind of debate is no easy task, especially in the Conference on Disarmament. At the same time, please allow me to welcome Canada as the second-to-last President of this year's session of the Conference. Ambassador Norton, please be assured of my delegation's support.

With regard to the programme of activities, there are two issues that will be of particular importance to Chile. First, the technical amendments to the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament that seek to put women and men on equal footing. We take this opportunity to note that we have the delegation of Australia to thank for setting this initiative into motion last year.

As Director-General Valovaya rightly pointed out, this initiative does not seek merely to correct a spelling mistake or something of that sort. It is a technical amendment of great symbolic and political significance for a body that has been unable to make progress in the fulfilment of its mandate for more than twenty years. Mr. President, let me state that we are not in favour of opening a general discussion on the rules of procedure. We are not against doing so, but we understand that for some delegations this is a sensitive issue.

Second, and to conclude, Mr. President, let me express my country's support for the side event on youth and disarmament. This event highlights the important role that young people, as key actors in connection with sustainability, inclusiveness and, in general, successful peacebuilding efforts, can play in conflict prevention and resolution. The world is changing at breakneck speed, and we need the visions and opinions of those who will lead it tomorrow.

My apologies, Mr. President, for having touched upon issues that will be on the agenda later, but this is my chance to do so. I wish you and the incoming Canadian presidency well. Thank you very much.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Ambassador.

(*spoke in English*)

Before I react, I have to give the floor to Ambassador Li Song of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Mr. President. I, too, would like to take this opportunity to express the Chinese delegation's views about the early resumption of in-person meetings of the Conference on Disarmament.

We agree with the opinions and expectations now put forward by the Group of 21. As the pandemic situation improves locally, we hope that in-person meetings can resume as soon

as possible, in accordance with the rules set by the Geneva secretariat here at the Palais des Nations, and based on the premise that the local regulations are met.

My colleagues and I are also very much looking forward to seeing our counterparts from all delegations in in-person meetings. It has been a long time.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my congratulations and gratitude to you for presiding over the thematic discussions held by the members of the Conference while you assumed the Conference's rotating presidency. In particular, during your presidency, we held thematic discussions on three topics: prevention of an arms race in outer space, negative security assurances and new types of weapons of mass destruction.

The discussions achieved positive results, which clearly shows that the Conference's members attach great importance to these agenda items. I think these discussions will be of great significance in further promoting the substantive work of the Conference on these topics.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you, your team and the secretariat for their assistance in helping the Chinese delegation to make arrangements for the successful address to the Conference by videoconference by the State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of China, Wang Yi.

In his statement, the State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs comprehensively set out our country's position and what it advocates in respect of multilateralism and the work of the Conference on questions of multilateral arms control. This address was well received by the Conference's member States. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to colleagues and delegations who responded positively to his statement at that meeting.

The address by State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs Wang Yi provides important guidance for our country's participation in multilateral arms control and in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Following this guidance, my colleagues and I will continue to participate in the work of the Conference in a positive, responsible and constructive manner. We will make good use of our country's role as the rotating President of the Conference, together with the rotating Presidents of the Conference next year, so as to ensure the full and smooth operation of the work of the Conference next year. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Ambassador Li Song of China. Is there anybody else who wishes to take the floor? I see no one.

I want to extend my greetings again to Ambassador Norton and Ambassador Li Song – you raised this point on meeting in person. I think we all share the same objective. We all know how the pandemic is evolving.

With regard to the programme, Ambassador Norton is going to give you more information. I know that she has a very good programme, a very interesting one. You raise so many points, and I think she should be able to give you more detail. Thank you.

As this is the final plenary meeting under the presidency of Cameroon, please allow me now to make a few concluding remarks.

Madam Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, ladies and gentlemen, ambassadors, as I have reached the end of my term of office as President of the Conference on Disarmament, allow me, on behalf of my country, Cameroon, and my delegation, to express my gratitude to you all for the interest and the enthusiasm you have shown throughout my presidency.

I am delighted by your very extensive participation in the debates through relevant statements and significant exchanges, which have allowed us to measure the importance of the issue of disarmament. During my presidency, we have had nine plenary meetings, all of which have given rise to rich, dense communication and have, above all, been illustrative of the dynamics of scientific and technological progress in the field of so-called weapons of mass destruction and related equipment.

These exchanges served as a reminder of the urgent need to revive negotiations on disarmament. The exercise was made possible thanks to you, ladies and gentlemen. You will therefore allow me to discharge this duty of gratitude to you all. First of all, to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and, of course, to all the technical teams under her leadership – they have spared no effort to facilitate our task.

Secondly, I would like to thank all the panellists for their expertise, their availability and especially their willingness to share. Their introduction helped to frame our discussion. In this respect, I would like to pay particular tribute to two personalities: Wang Yi, State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, for his important communication, which enabled us to understand the policy and, above all, the vision of this great country concerning disarmament; and Lassina Zerbo, former Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization. His presentation made us aware of the magnitude of the task.

(spoke in French)

In the same vein, I would like to commend the many delegations that have shown unreserved interest in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. They have made statements reflecting their national and international public policies on disarmament. The fact that these delegations have spoken frankly, setting out their points of view, visions and perspectives on disarmament in the various areas of our discussions, is testament to a constructive attitude that gives us hope and, above all, bodes well for the prompt resumption of negotiations on disarmament.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to make four brief observations that may enrich our reflections on the work carried out under my presidency.

First, we have noted with satisfaction the need expressed by all the delegations that have taken the floor to safeguard outer space from military use. A peaceful, useful and sustainable space environment must therefore be maintained. To this end, only a legally binding instrument in accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/36 is, in the view of the majority, the best path to guaranteeing security in space.

Second, the importance of negative security assurances has been highlighted. Many delegations have underlined the importance and urgency of establishing effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Nuclear-weapon States must be encouraged to commit to using them only when they have been attacked. One of the measures currently in force that should be respected and, above all, promoted is the creation of several nuclear-weapon-free zones that bring together many States.

Third, with regard to new types of systems of weapons of mass destruction such as radiological weapons, it has become apparent that the international community should underscore the role of science and technology in strengthening global security. New technologies, although positive, also present new types of risk, such as cyberattacks and the risks posed by social networks.

Fourth, I do not think that I am mistaken in stressing that the objective of our Conference is to achieve a world free of weapons of mass destruction, be they nuclear, chemical or biological. The Conference on Disarmament is the pre-eminent institution for building and promoting international peace and security. Agenda items 3, 4 and 5, which were discussed during my presidency, as well as those which will be addressed next week by Ms. Leslie Norton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada, and also, of course, those discussed under the presidency of Bulgaria form the thematic basis of the Conference on Disarmament.

Before passing on the torch to my colleague Leslie Norton, to whom I wish every success and pledge my delegation's full support, I would like to conclude by stressing two things. First, the United Nations is firmly committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Is a world free of all these weapons an impossible dream? Think of the tranquillity, the harmony, that could prevail in such a world. Second, for the sake of our common destiny, which is inevitable in such a highly globalized world, my country,

Cameroon, and my continent, Africa, have faith in multilateralism. Our dearest wish is for a world where international peace and security are guaranteed.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is an urgent need for the Conference on Disarmament to play its part. It must emerge from its lethargy of recent years. We must revive negotiations, the only way out, taking into account all the issues, including, of course, disarmament and development. Let us embrace the preamble to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which reminds us of the urgency of negotiations on disarmament, stating that since “wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. Thank you for your kind attention.

(spoke in English)

I would now like to give the floor to any delegation that wishes to take it. I give the floor to the Egyptian delegation.

Mr. Reda (Egypt): Allow me at the beginning, Mr. President, to thank you very much for organizing this meeting on the modalities and also to seize this opportunity to thank you for your leadership during the past weeks and for the excellent work that you, Sir, and your delegation have done and the very interesting and comprehensive debates and discussions that we have had on the core agenda items. I cannot miss this opportunity to extend our thanks to the secretariat for all the work that it has been doing in such difficult times.

Mr. President, my first objective on taking the floor was to thank you, of course, and, second, to make sure we know how we will be proceeding – if the secretariat can give us a final briefing – in the coming weeks. Will it be with fully in-person meetings? Will it be a mix of both in-person and virtual formats? How will things proceed? Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Egypt for its statement. I now give the floor to Kenya.

Ms. Keah (Kenya): Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor. On behalf of Ambassador Cleopa Mailu, the delegation of Kenya wishes to commend you on the excellent and steadfast stewardship of the Conference on Disarmament under your presidency. The delegation of Kenya is convinced that the thematic discussions that have been held during your presidency have made a significant contribution to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The delegation of Kenya also wishes to extend its support to Ambassador Leslie Norton of Canada, as Canada assumes the next presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Kenya. Is there anybody else who wants to take the floor? I see no one.

I think that, as for the question from Egypt, you will have more details from Ambassador Norton. In addition, the secretariat will provide information within the next few days on the modality of the next meeting. Thank you.

As per usual practice, I would now like to invite the next President of the Conference on Disarmament, Ms. Leslie E. Norton, to take the floor.

Ms. Norton (Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. President, and congratulations on the conclusion of a very successful presidency. And thank you also to the secretariat for so ably supporting the Conference on Disarmament.

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, it will be an honour and a privilege for me to serve as the President of the Conference on Disarmament, following in the large footsteps left by my predecessors, the Ambassadors of Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria and Cameroon, and in advance of my colleague from Chile.

You have made Herculean efforts to seek agreement on a programme of work for the Conference. Failing that, you continued with interesting and fruitful thematic discussions on many topics of high importance for this body. I commend all of you for your skilful and hard

work in advancing our common objectives, and I look forward to working with Chile and supporting the Chilean delegation during its presidency.

Mr. President, if you allow me, I will say a few words about Canada's plans for our presidency of the Conference. We are grateful to delegations for their willingness to engage with us in consultations and in the preparation of our programme, including 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 many other delegations.

We are in the process of concluding our first round of consultations and will circulate our programme in writing shortly. As you know, our presidency stretches over a period of three months: June, July and August. During this time, adjustments to our programme may still be made, so we do encourage you to be in touch with our delegation if you have any questions or concerns.

On Monday, 21 June, we are planning to have a virtual meeting of the group of the Presidents at 11 a.m., with regional coordinators joining us at 11.30 a.m. On Tuesday, 22 June, from 10 a.m. to noon, will be the first plenary meeting of Canada's presidency. After some introductory remarks, we plan to have an open thematic discussion on agenda item 6: comprehensive programme of disarmament.

We do not plan to limit the discussion in any way or have any guest speakers for this item. We intend to hold this plenary meeting in hybrid format and look forward to seeing many of you in person. Because of its hybrid nature, the duration of the meeting will be two hours. If the list of speakers is not exhausted in the morning, we intend to continue the discussion on Tuesday afternoon starting at 3 p.m.

An open discussion of item 7, transparency in armaments, is scheduled for 3 August. Again, we are not planning to limit the discussion in any way or have any guest speakers.

On 27 July, we plan to have a youth event. The involvement of youth in disarmament discussions is in accordance with resolutions adopted at the General Assembly and in the Security Council. It is also a priority of Ms. Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, so we have invited her to offer introductory remarks. We have also invited Ms. Wickramanayake – and I apologize for destroying her name – Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, to speak to the Conference.

Finally, we would like to give a panel of four youth disarmament champions an opportunity to share their thoughts in this forum. They are from Turkey, Canada and Viet Nam. One of them was born in Rwanda and raised in Uganda.

Another item we propose for our presidency, based on expressions of interest from States across the regions, is to discuss and make a linguistic and technical update to the Conference's rules of procedure to reflect the equality of men and women. The proposed linguistic update does not change the substance of the rules of procedure in any way. Rather, it simply corrects the rules so that they accurately reflect the fact that both men and women can occupy the roles of representative to the Conference, head of a Conference delegation, President of the Conference and Secretary-General of the Conference.

Finally, on 10 August, we plan to have a discussion on the report prepared by Australia found in document CD/2197. During its presidency, Australia had undertaken extensive consultations asking Conference member States for their views about the priorities and the role of the Conference on Disarmament, the coordination approach taken by the group of the Presidents, ways to break the deadlock and ways to be more effective.

Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, this paper has not been put to the Conference for discussion, so during its presidency Canada would like to give States an opportunity to reflect on and discuss the issues identified in the Australian paper. I look forward to working closely with all of you over the next two months.

(spoke in French)

Lastly, I would like to thank you personally, Mr. President, for your tireless work in the Conference.

The President *(spoke in French)*: Thank you, Ambassador, for your statement.

(spoke in English)

Distinguished delegates, this concludes our business for today. Before closing, I would like to thank you all for your strong and constructive engagement in our discussions these past four weeks.

Please allow me also to thank the conference officers and interpreters for their support. The secretariat will be in touch regarding the timing and logistical arrangements for the next plenary meetings. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.