

Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 5 August 2021, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Ms. Leslie E. Norton (Canada)

The President: I call to order the 1586th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, as previously announced, my intention this morning is to discuss the proposed technical linguistic update of the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure to reflect the equality of men and women at the Conference and to consider adopting the draft decision we have circulated for the English version of the rules of procedure.

As President, I have taken up this issue based on expressions of interest from many delegations across the regions and in continuation of the valuable work that Australia undertook during its presidency, for which I am grateful.

The presidency has undertaken informal consultations on a regional and bilateral basis with many delegations, circulated a draft decision and held an informal plenary meeting on Tuesday this week to discuss this simple but important matter: whether we can agree on including women in the language of the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure in the same way that men are included and reflect on paper what is happening in practice.

The fact that this is an issue of interest to delegations is reflected by the large number of delegations that have taken the floor to address this issue. We have counted 24 delegations that have spoken on this issue and we are grateful for the respectful manner in which this conversation has taken place. We look forward to continuing this discussion today in this formal plenary meeting, the meeting format which was requested by a number of delegations.

If you permit me, I will take this opportunity to make some remarks on behalf of my own country, Canada. The fact is that the language of the rules of procedure is not inclusive of women, at least not in the English-language version. Referring to “he”, “him” or “his” does not in any way include women. It is as simple as that. Our delegation believes that the language in the rules of procedure can be updated by way of a few simple fixes, as captured in the draft decision that has been circulated.

The proposed linguistic update to five of the rules in the English-language version serves to reflect on paper what already happens in practice – that both women and men can and do occupy the roles of representative to the Conference on Disarmament, head of a delegation to the Conference, President of the Conference and Secretary-General of the Conference.

Our delegation believes that we can all agree on the equality of men and women. This principle is at the very heart of the United Nations values. Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations calls for respect for human rights for all without distinction based on sex. Equality of men and women was made part of international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by other global and regional human rights instruments. If men and women already participate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament in practice, why, then, make the change, you may ask? It is very simple. The rules of procedure are an important document for the Conference on Disarmament and reflecting the equality of men and women therein is a simple but important message to everyone reading the rules, including diplomats, students, academics and the public more generally.

Language is a powerful instrument, and non-discrimination and the inclusion of women are directly relevant to the work that the Conference on Disarmament does. The notion that the Conference would not be willing to make this simple update would send a strong negative message to everyone who does not see themselves in the current language used, which is over 50 per cent of the world’s population. If you live together in a house and both of you have built the house together, share the operating costs and claim to own the house, you want both parties to be on the deed of the house. Just the practice of living together is not enough. It is a sign of mutual respect to have both owners on the deed – I hope I am not creating any marital disputes with this comment in case spouses are listening.

Changing the rules of procedure to make editorial and factual updates is nothing unusual. For example, it has been done to update the names of States, like the Islamic Republic of Iran, Germany, the Russian Federation or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At times, these kinds of updates have even occurred on the basis of simple notification by the

presidency or the secretariat, while, at other times, decisions have been taken by the Conference. To avoid any misunderstandings and to underline the significance of this simple but important update, our delegation would support a decision by this august assembly to update the rules of procedure by consensus.

We have heard the concern that this linguistic update may open up a Pandora's box leading to all kinds of other updates. This is not the case, for four reasons: (1) the proposed changes do not change the substance of the rules of procedure; (2) similar changes made in the past have not opened a Pandora's box; (3) these updates reflect existing practice; and (4) based on the consensus rule applicable in this forum, States can object to any other changes to the rules of procedure. There is no need to object to this proposal to secure one's right to object to another proposal.

Finally, we have heard some concerns about this update being a distraction from the work the Conference on Disarmament should be undertaking, which is negotiating disarmament instruments. We absolutely agree that the Conference should fulfil its core mandate and regret that it has not been able to do so. Making this update conditional on first fixing everything else that is wrong with the Conference on Disarmament is, in our view, not a reasonable approach. Furthermore, in our view, now is the time to get the housekeeping work done.

In our view, updating the rules of procedure on a matter that should not pose any substantial difficulties is something that could be done quickly, and it could serve as a confidence- and trust-building exercise for future work. It does not replace the other work of the Conference on Disarmament that needs to get done, but neither does it do any harm to that work. To the contrary, sending a message to the women of the world that encourages them to participate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament and to be co-owners of this important forum can only help in achieving our common objectives.

I would now like to give the floor to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Madam Tatiana Valovaya.

Ms. Valovaya (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament): Madam President, distinguished delegates, it is an honour to address the Conference today at this very important meeting at which you will consider the proposal by the Canadian presidency for a technical linguistic update to the Conference's rules of procedure. The proposed update would recognize the equality between women and men and the fact that both men and women can occupy – and have occupied – the roles of representative, head of delegation, President, and Secretary-General of the Conference.

As I already noted in my remarks to the Conference last year, such a technical update should be automatic, like correcting a spelling mistake. This purely editorial update will not substantively change or otherwise affect the rules of procedure of the Conference. Nonetheless, it would succeed in sending a signal to the international community that the Conference recognizes the fundamental principle of gender equality and that we have moved away from the unfortunate practice in which office-holders were almost inevitably men.

As an International Gender Champion, I am encouraged by the efforts of the Australian and Canadian presidencies as well as by the support for this amendment among many States parties of this Conference.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations continues to emphasize that ensuring the equal participation of women in disarmament forums is essential for the attainment of sustainable peace and security. Their contributions must be acknowledged not just in speeches but with concrete actions like the one under consideration today.

I and my team stand ready to support the Conference in its efforts to modernize its rules of procedure to reflect today's realities.

The President: Thank you very much, Madam Secretary-General. I now open the floor to delegations that wish to take the floor on this matter. The first speaker on my list is the delegate of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cleobury (United Kingdom): Madam President, I would first like to welcome the presence among us today of Madam Valovaya and to thank her for the statement that she

just made. It sends a strong signal of her support for this initiative and the importance of gender equality, and I hope that she will be able to witness some progress on gender equality today.

It is an honour for me to speak first today in this important discussion and I hope it will be an important day for gender equality in the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation would like to express its full support for the draft decision before us today, which would make this Conference's rules of procedure gender-equal. This is a simple, technical change that is long overdue and should not be controversial. We would also like to thank you, Madam President, and your delegation for organizing the informal meeting on Tuesday. During that discussion, we noted the broad range of cross-regional support for your draft decision.

Even those who raised concerns said that they had no substantive objection, in principle, to making the rules of procedure gender-equal. On that basis, unless there are substantive objections expressed in this formal meeting, we think we should adopt this draft decision as soon as possible.

We would also like to thank the delegation of Australia, which did so much work on this issue during its presidency last year, and to thank the Canadian presidency for taking it forward.

Madam President, this draft decision proposes a simple update to the rules of procedure and we hope we can move swiftly to adopt it.

The President: I thank the delegate of the United Kingdom for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Peru.

Mr. Aréstegui Bravo (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, Ambassador Silvia Alfaro will have the honour of speaking. I would very much appreciate it if we could postpone our intervention for about five minutes. Thank you.

The President: Thank you very much. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, Madam President, and I hope that, after today, I can simply say to you, "Thank you, President".

The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. I would like to thank the Canadian presidency and the former Australian presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for bringing this important topic to the attention of the Conference.

The Netherlands fully supports the proposed technical linguistic update to the rules of procedure of the Conference as outlined in the draft submitted by the presidency. In our view, incorporating inclusive gender-neutral terms in the rules of procedure is a simple but necessary linguistic update that reflects reality and, frankly, is long overdue.

Gender equality and diversity are priorities in the foreign policy of the Netherlands. We firmly believe that they contribute positively to our work and goals, including in the context of disarmament. The presence and the address of the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament – whom I also hope, from today onward, to be able to address as "Secretary-General Tatiana Valovaya" – in this formal plenary meeting is comforting and is, in our view, a clear sign of her full support for the proposed decision. As she said in her address, these changes should be as automatic as correcting a typographical mistake. I could not agree more.

Given the fact that a large majority of Conference on Disarmament members have expressed full support for the technical linguistic updates to the rules of procedure of the Conference, the Netherlands sincerely hopes and expects that the Conference on Disarmament will adopt this decision by consensus. I thank you, President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Spain.

Mr. Manglano Aboín (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Madam President. Spain associates itself with the statement to be made later by the delegation of the European Union and wishes to make some comments on its own behalf. Madam President, my delegation thanks you for having resumed work on the initiative launched in 2020 by the Australian delegation to draft gender-neutral rules of procedure, which unfortunately we were unable to discuss at the time owing to the outbreak of the pandemic, which interrupted the work of the Conference. We also appreciate Ms. Valovaya's presence and message today, on what we hope will be a historic day for gender equality and for the Conference on Disarmament.

Madam President, distinguished delegates, multilateralism and effective equality between men and women are basic pillars of Spain's foreign policy. Consequently, we could not agree more with the idea of updating the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament in accordance with the proposal before us. Times change, and fortunately the composition of delegations also changes and we are seeing delegations that are becoming more and more equal. Therefore, Spain supports any proposal to update the rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral.

The proposal before us is simple but significant. It does not change the meaning or substance of the rules of procedure, but rather corrects them so that, in an accurate and grammatically appropriate way, they reflect an obvious reality on which, I believe, we all agree: both men and women can represent their States in this forum, can head their delegations or even, as we see today, preside over the Conference itself. In our spoken interventions we already use terms such as Madam President, so we understand that the proposal we are discussing today – which, I repeat, does not alter the way the Conference works – should not raise any major objection. Previous updates of the rules of procedure to reflect changes in the nomenclature of some States posed no problems, so in my delegation's view the idea of making the rules of procedure gender-neutral should not be problematic either.

The question is simple, very simple: as a forum, are we for or against equality between men and women? If we are for it, and I have not heard any delegation either today or on Tuesday say otherwise, the proposal put forward should not pose any problem. However, last Tuesday and perhaps today as well, we have heard some delegations question the added value or usefulness of the proposal before us, or even speak of Pandora's boxes where, frankly, there are none. To these arguments, my delegation repeats that the fact that the rules of procedure as currently worded do not prevent the participation of women in this forum does not mean that we cannot, or even should not, adopt a series of amendments to improve and correct them. Nor can we see why a proposal that is in perfect accord with Sustainable Development Goal 5 should not be able to command a consensus in this room.

In any case, we are grateful for the efforts of Australia and Canada, to which Spain has attempted to contribute in a small way. Although the discussion here is of course not about language but about a matter of principle, my delegation, with the help of the Ambassador of Spain on Special Mission for Gender Equality in Foreign Policy and of the Equality Unit of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, has produced a Spanish-language draft of the gender-neutral rules of procedure. This draft has been passed to the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament, which in turn has forwarded it to the translation services, to which we hope it will be of great use.

Madam President, I would like to conclude by reiterating Spain's appreciation for your work and the work done by Australia, and my delegation's full support for the proposal to update the rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of Spain for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Madam President, the United States absolutely concurs with this technical update to the rules of procedure and requests that you table the draft decision for action. This update brings the Conference on Disarmament into the twentieth century, not even the twenty-first. The fact is that we should have approved such an update years ago, and we thank Australia for proposing it.

We feel this update is purely technical in nature, much as we last updated the rules of procedure in 2003 to remove Yugoslavia as a member State upon its break-up. We actually agree with those who say we should not expend undue time or resources on this question, as approving a technical change should not take more than a few minutes. While we understand that the President held the informal consultations on this question at the request of some delegations, we do not see why it was really necessary and, frankly, if any delegations are opposed to this update on its merits, we would appreciate their voicing that opposition clearly.

These objections are not only out of touch with reality. They are insulting to Director-General Valovaya, our President, my own Deputy Permanent Representative and all other women representing their nations in the Conference on Disarmament. This remarkably embarrassing escapade is a microcosm of why we cannot move forward with anything in the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Nigeria.

Mr. Adejola (Nigeria) (*via video link*): May I salute your efforts, Madam President, in preparing and transmitting to member States this proposal on the linguistic and technical changes to the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure. Let me also seize the opportunity to welcome Madam Valovaya and support her strong and concrete views on the issue under deliberation today. Please also permit me to quickly thank Australia for first mooted the idea, during its presidency last year, of a linguistic and technical update to the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure to reflect the current realities of mainstreaming gender in all aspects of our work and life.

It is sad but true that the Conference on Disarmament so far has failed for over two decades to make progress on its core mandates of negotiating legally binding disarmament instruments. It is also disturbing that over the past three years the Conference on Disarmament has failed to adopt a programme of work to carry our work forward. Nevertheless, let it be placed on record that Nigeria has no misgivings regarding the proposal by Canada for a linguistic and technical update to the Conference on Disarmament rules, as we believe that whatever we have right now, in terms of the proposal, further mainstreams the appropriate use of gender specifics in our work. Need I underscore, as well, that progress has already been made in integrating gender perspectives in arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament efforts by the United Nations. In the same vein, gender equality is in line with my country's Constitution and government policy. We have been working assiduously and diligently as well to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all aspects of work in our nation.

Arising from the above, Nigeria supports the proposal on linguistic and technical changes to the rules of procedure. We believe it will make gender-neutrality more meaningful. It is also Nigeria's belief that the planned change is merely a technical amendment.

However, given the suspicion – if I could call it that – and doubt that the proposal has generated, and in association with the suggestion by our dear friendly brotherly country Pakistan, the six Presidents of this session might look to conduct more consultations to assuage, if possible, the doubts, suspicions and concerns of some member States. This would ensure that we achieve consensus on this matter. Our attention is also drawn to the point, raised by the Ambassador of China, that the linguistic issue does not arise in the Chinese version of the rules of procedure. The Conference on Disarmament secretariat, in this regard, might wish to enlighten my delegation and others regarding this observation.

Finally, Madam President, the proposal before us – that is, the linguistic and technical update – is noble and auspicious. My delegation believes that all efforts should be made to ensure it secures the necessary consensus among member States of the Conference, because failure to arrive at a consensus on as simple a matter as mainstreaming gender in the Conference on Disarmament's activities could further send wrong signals to the disarmament community that the Conference is indeed in murkier waters than initially construed.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Nigeria for his statement. I now give the floor to the delegate of Colombia.

Ms. Castillo Castro (Colombia) (*via video link, spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Madam President. Allow me first to thank you and your team, and the previous presidencies, for all your efforts, which have allowed us to continue important discussions despite the current complex conditions.

With regard to your proposed decision, submitted in document CD/WP.635, my delegation appreciates your efforts and your decision to pursue the important work done by the Australian delegation in this regard. For Colombia, the permanent defence of equity and diversity is a commitment of the utmost importance and we are convinced that gender equality is an essential condition for the creation of equitable, prosperous, peaceful, just and sustainable societies.

In this context, we welcome your proposal to carry out a technical and linguistic update of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament. The decision, which does not affect the substance of the rules, is a fair recognition of the reality that women can occupy any position in carrying out the work of the Conference. My delegation sees this proposal as a necessary update to a set of rules that were drawn up in a context very different from the current one, rules in which I personally, as a woman, do not find any acknowledgement that I might come to occupy the most important positions in the Conference on Disarmament.

Madam President, my delegation considers that the adoption of this decision is no substitute for the adoption of a programme of work and even less the fulfilment of a mandate that we are simply not fulfilling. This decision goes much further and aims to ensure that the framework within which we seek to carry out our mandate speaks to all the people who work for those ends. We therefore call on those delegations that have expressed concern to show flexibility, rise above the complex climate of the Conference and support your proposal, recognizing that this forum can adapt to the changing conditions of the international stage and reach agreements that benefit all States parties. Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the delegate of Colombia for her statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Mexico.

Ms. Martínez Liévano (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Madam President. We thank you once again for including this item, which seeks to move forward with the proposal, initially presented by the Australian presidency, for technical adjustments to the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, so that its wording reflects a gender perspective. As already mentioned, my delegation believes that this is a necessary, simple, concrete, uncontroversial text that is consistent with the egalitarian agenda that has been promoted in the United Nations and other international organizations in recent decades.

As we know, language facilitates all thought processes and, in that sense, creates our own reality. In using language we reproduce biases and stereotypes that have systematically excluded, minimized or devalued various groups, so it is crucial to pay attention to usage. Luckily, language is a dynamic, changing tool, and though it may be capable of stoking the fires of exclusion or intransigence, it is also a tool that can contribute to equality. It is an ever-changing instrument that evolves to meet the needs of the society that uses it.

As a member of the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group, and as a country with an active feminist foreign policy, we call for the use of appropriate language that avoids generalizations and does away with stereotypes and traditional gender roles that reinforce the idea of inequality by making anything that is different from the male gender subordinate to it. We are fully aware that changing the language in the rules of procedure will not solve the enormous challenges still facing equitable gender representation in the area of disarmament, an area in which there is demonstrably less diverse participation than in other issues on the United Nations agenda. But this would undoubtedly send the basic message that the structural shortcomings have been recognized and that there is awareness and a willingness to address the problem. Making the proposed changes, as several delegations have pointed out, should be an almost obvious and automatic step for this forum. The Conference on Disarmament must be brought up to date with universal trends towards gender equality and recognize the outstanding work that women heads of delegation, the Secretary-General of the Conference and many women representatives are now doing.

Madam President, this delegation has not heard any convincing argument as to why such a simple change should not be made. While some delegations have said that the rules do not present any real obstacle and do not prevent us referring to “Madam Chair”, it is a fact that identification matters, the ability to read the rules of procedure and feel identified matters. I know this is important for me, for my delegation and for the generations to come. Should it not be possible to adopt this proposal, the Conference on Disarmament would be sending a message confirming that it is an anachronism and has come to a paradigmatic dead end, and that would lead us to question this body’s future viability. The message to the international community, to which we are beholden, would be one of total inefficiency and a lack of political will to reach even the most basic agreements.

We must be clear: these technical changes are not going to open a Pandora’s box leading to an overhaul of the rules. These changes simply reflect the reality and diversity of this room. My delegation is in a position to accept the proposal submitted by the Canadian presidency as is. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the delegate of Mexico for her statement, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Madam President, I would like to first of all thank Madam Valovaya for being here with us at today’s very important session. Her presence is especially encouraging for us in view of today’s agenda.

Japan fully supports the Canadian presidency’s initiative to technically and linguistically update the Conference on Disarmament’s rules of procedure to reflect the equality of men and women. Japan can also go along with the draft of the rules of procedure distributed by you, Madam President, on 28 July, as it stands now. As language evolves with time, text that was impeccably drafted may become obsolete or inadequate. It is appropriate and even necessary to amend the basic documents like the rules of procedure to reflect the relevant new circumstances. I would like also to add that Japan is in full support of the promotion of gender equality in general.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Germany.

Ms. Mikeska (Germany): Madam President, I would like to thank Australia and Canada for this initiative. I only recently arrived at the Conference on Disarmament and I might not know much yet about the Conference or its rules of procedure, but I do have some experience with other international organizations and I must say that I am somehow astonished to find that only male colleagues seem to be respected in several language versions of the Conference’s rules of procedure. As my Ambassador mentioned in Tuesday’s informal meeting, this seems simply outdated to us in comparison with other international organizations. I am not so much surprised that such wording was chosen in the first place, but what I find remarkable is that it was not corrected rapidly and smoothly the very moment a female ambassador took over the function of the presidency for the first time, proving the wording to be factually wrong.

While what we are looking at is not more than a few linguistic changes that do not create any new rights or obligations, there truly is a symbolic relevance to this. It would reflect the mere fact that both men and women participate in arms control and disarmament processes.

The President: I thank the delegate of Germany for her statement, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Peru.

Ms. Alfaro Espinosa (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Madam President. As this is the first time that my delegation has taken the floor during your presidency, I would like to sincerely congratulate you, as we have before us an interesting agenda of activities that has undoubtedly called for careful planning and execution by you and your team. You can count on Peru’s full support for the success of your administration. I especially welcome the presence of Ms. Valovaya at our meeting.

Peru greatly appreciates Canada’s decision to resume the discussions launched by the Australian presidency in 2020, on technical adjustments to the rules of procedure of the

Conference on Disarmament to ensure gender-neutral language. Peru strongly supports Canada in this task, as every action counts when it comes to breaking down barriers to gender equality, and my country is convinced that the empowerment of women and gender equality have a direct impact on the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation does not lose sight of the negotiating mandate given to the Conference on Disarmament. On the contrary, we reaffirm our position that the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work should be the most concrete expression of political will on the part of States to resume the substantive work of the Conference. However, following the principle of the primacy of reality, we recognize that the current session is drawing to a close and has now exhausted every possible opportunity to make substantive progress. Under the circumstances, we see merit in the efforts of the Canadian presidency to make relevant use of the remaining time to take a decision on an issue that has been unnecessarily postponed.

Madam President, Peru appreciates the draft decision that your presidency circulated last week, in which we see specific wording that seeks only to replace a few words by more inclusive terms, that is, by ungendered pronouns and determiners. The value of having a draft decision such as this is that it provides clarity and certainty and allays fears of a hidden agenda. The proposed changes are of a linguistic nature only and do not in any way affect the substantive content of the rules of procedure of the Conference.

In view of the above, this week my country wishes to register its unreserved and unconditional support for the draft decision, and we invite member States to see the truth and authenticity of the Canadian proposal and to give it their pragmatic support. "Small actions, big impact". Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Peru for her intervention, and I now turn to the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

Ms. Homolkova (Slovenia): Madam President, Madam Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, and the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and Georgia, which align themselves with this statement.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Canada on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to pledge our full support for the remainder of the Conference meetings in an inclusive, transparent and safe manner.

At the outset, let me begin by commending the hard work of the former Conference presidency of Australia in bringing this important topic to our attention last year. We regret that the unfortunate and unpredictable circumstances that occurred last year due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic meant that we were unable to deal with this issue when it first arose. The European Union expresses its full support for the proposed technical change to the rules of procedure of the Conference.

In showcasing this support, however, the European Union wishes to make it abundantly clear that this change is no more than linguistic and that it will entail no new rights or obligations for any of the delegations of the Conference membership. We are of the view that this simple technical update to the wording of rules 10, 11, 13, 16 and 37 of the English version of the Conference rules of procedure reflects the reality of the Conference and its functioning today.

The European Union appreciates the fact of life that women, like men, participate in and shape the outcome of arms control and disarmament processes, as is perhaps best illustrated through our current Conference President, Ambassador Norton.

The President: I thank the representative of Slovenia for her statement on behalf of the European Union. I now turn to the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Madam President. My delegation would like to echo all the points that were raised by other delegations supporting

this draft decision. I thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Madam Valovaya, for her strong support. Also I thank Canada and Australia for putting this on the agenda of the Conference.

It is indeed a simple and technical update in nature, but also it is a matter of principle. My delegation believes this is the area where we can work together and achieve consensus across regions, regardless of our political positions. By doing so, it is going to make the Conference on Disarmament rules or procedure up to date, where men and women equally participate in disarmament and arms control affairs. It would also be conducive to a good working atmosphere.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea for his statement. I now turn to the delegate of Chile. Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Moraga (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam Director-General and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Madam President, as this is my delegation's first formal intervention, allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency. We believe that your professionalism, as well as that of the other delegations occupying the presidency this session and with whom we have had the honour of working this year, will facilitate our future work as you lead this body for a couple more weeks. In the interest of time, allow me to refer briefly to the topic that brings us together today. My delegation considers it appropriate to seek avenues to move forward on the proposal initially presented by Australia and taken up again by Canada, for a technical update to the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, leading to gender-neutral wording.

Secondly, my delegation shares the arguments already expressed by several delegations. The proposal reflects the globally recognized need to build more egalitarian societies. It is consistent with the gender equality policy promoted by the United Nations and reflected in the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda. It makes visible, recognizes and values those women who have achieved leadership positions and responsibilities.

Thirdly, although Chile has expressed its support for a general revision of the rules of procedure of the Conference, we would point out, taking into account the divergent positions and concerns of various delegations, that the proposal for a technical update to the rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral does not imply a general revision of the rules of procedure, but is confined to the terms of the draft decision presented.

The update of procedural rules in one way or another is an exercise that is undertaken as a matter of necessary routine in various bodies. Determining whether the rules that we, as member States, have given ourselves to help our body function are in line with the values that societies have been fighting to establish, and remedying the inequalities and injustices that we have been shaking off, should be a source of satisfaction for all of us member States, who, through these symbolic gestures, are either creating our reality or condemning ourselves to it.

Lastly, Madam President, a personal note. At the start of my diplomatic career, an ambassador friend taught me that there are two kinds of battles worth fighting: the first kind, the battles we know we will win; the second, the battles of principle. For me personally, and for my delegation, as a Chilean diplomat accredited to the Conference on Disarmament, gender equality as manifested in the updating of the rules of procedure is a matter of principle. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the delegate of Chile for her intervention, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Norway.

Mr. Rydning (Norway): Thank you, President. First, let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of the full support of the delegation of Norway. I will now deliver a joint statement on behalf of the Nordic Countries, Finland, Sweden and my own country Norway.

We would like to thank the presidency for preparing the draft decision to render the rules of procedure of the Conference gender-neutral. We would also like to express our gratitude to Australia for proposing this initiative at last year's session.

Changing the rules of procedure so that they become gender-neutral is a mere technical matter, and, in this day and age, there is no justification for clinging on to language that reflects outdated perspectives on gender and equal participation.

Some have cautioned that modifying the rules of procedure is like opening a Pandora's box: we disagree. This is simply a linguistic modernization with no substantive or procedural impact. The integration of gender-diverse perspectives and the promotion of equal participation of women and men in disarmament is fundamental to ensure robust and effective processes and outcomes.

The promotion of gender sensitivity and equality is a long-standing priority in our foreign policies and it is thus with great pleasure that we give our full support to the small but significant modification proposed in the draft decision.

We acknowledge that the various official language versions might require different modifications in order to make them gender-neutral. This is a typical issue that translators grapple with and is no argument against making the principled decision to modernize the language. However, if necessary to garner consensus, Finland, Norway and Sweden would suggest that the decision should expressly specify the purpose of the change – that is, to make the rules of procedures gender-neutral. That would give sufficient guidance for the translation into the other official languages.

The President: I thank the delegate of Norway for his statement, and I now turn to the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Ali Abadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Let me first welcome Madam Valovaya, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, to this plenary meeting.

It has been very clear, including during the debate we had in the informal session last Tuesday, that there is no consensus in the Conference to consider the proposed draft decision for amending the rules of procedure.

During the decades of the work of this body, gender has never been an issue and, until now, not one person has interpreted these rules of procedure in a discriminatory manner. If some do that, we clearly announce that it is a false interpretation. Women and men have participated and will participate equally in the work of the Conference on Disarmament and represent their countries and assume its seats, including its presidency and the position of Secretary-General of the Conference, without any discrimination, as has always been the practice and is currently the case.

On gender equality within the Conference on Disarmament, there is consensus. But on the necessity of opening and changing the rules of procedure, there are divergent views and, as was clear in the informal consultation, there is no consensus on this draft proposed decision.

It is unfortunate that the time of this meeting is allocated to a problem that does not exist and the main agenda of the Conference on Disarmament – namely, nuclear disarmament – is disregarded. Are we doing this just to pretend that the Conference on Disarmament has started to make a move? Does it really make much sense to engage the Conference in a trivial manner that serves no serious purpose other than fuelling some suspicion and stirring some controversy?

The Conference on Disarmament has for long been facing a detrimental deadlock, not because of the existence or lack of any adjective but rather due to the lack of minimum political will on the part of certain nuclear-weapon States to let the Conference accomplish its main mandate. The fact that the Conference's rules of procedure only contain "he", not "she", has proved to be no obstacle to the participation of women. That is exactly how Member States have been acting in the United Nations General Assembly, as well as in other international bodies. Please take a look at articles 97, 98 and 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, where it uses only "he" or "him" in reference to the Secretary-General. Does that mean that the Charter would not allow a woman to be elected as a Secretary-General of the United Nations? Certainly not.

Let me be clear. As far as Iran is concerned, we have definitely no problem with having a feminine/masculine/neutral adjective everywhere. In the Persian language, we use

the same word for “he” and “she”. My delegation appreciates the efforts of Australia last year, when it raised this issue and made the round of consultations with the delegations. But it was our understanding that the idea had been shelved following the consultation and conclusion that there was no consensus to go ahead. The Conference on Disarmament would be better off if the current presidency would take stock of last year’s experience and focus on substantial issues that have long remained neglected because of the persistent lack of political will for nuclear disarmament.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Switzerland.

Mr. Masmejean (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Madam President, we would like to thank you for organizing this plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament and for inviting us to look at the linguistic shortcoming in the Conference’s rules of procedure regarding the names in the feminine of the various titles and functions.

We are also grateful to Australia for having raised this issue for the first time during its presidency of the Conference during the 2020 session and to our Secretary-General, Ms. Valovaya, for her statement this morning.

We fully agree with the proposal of taking the necessary steps, without further delay, so that men and women, masculine and feminine, are treated equally in the rules of procedure. Many arguments have been put forward for making this decision and I do not wish to repeat them. I would simply like to note that the objective is not merely to ensure that our rules of procedure reflect reality. It is also and especially a matter of principle, a matter of respect and fairness towards the many women who occupy functions at our Conference.

This shortcoming in the rules of procedure could easily be remedied by making the necessary technical amendments to treat masculine and feminine terms equally, as shown by the draft decision you circulated before our meeting.

As many delegations have pointed out, there are not really any convincing arguments against making this decision, and making it without further delay. We therefore hope that the Conference will be able to take this step and to take it under your presidency.

The President: I thank the delegate of Switzerland for his statement. I now give the floor to the delegate of Austria.

Mr. Sternat (Austria): Madam President, Austria fully aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union. Let me begin by thanking Australia for bringing this important topic to our attention last year and expressing our gratitude to you, Madam President, for picking this important topic up again.

Austria fully concurs with the proposed technical change, which would make the Conference on Disarmament rules of procedure gender-neutral. From our point of view, this simple update in the wording reflects existing practice, the reality of the Conference of Disarmament and its functioning today. I completely agree with the Ambassador of the United States when he said that this change brings us to the reality of the twentieth century rather than the twenty-first.

In concluding, and as we are under the Canadian presidency at this time, let me refresh a six-year-old Canadian quote that explains why my delegation thinks this change is long overdue: “Because it’s 2021”.

The President: I thank the delegate of Austria for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Díaz Mendoza (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Madam President. On behalf of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, we welcome the presence of Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, and we appreciate her important observations and comments today. We take this opportunity to salute and thank Ambassador Leslie Norton of Canada, President of the Conference on Disarmament, and the Conference secretariat, for their strenuous efforts in organizing this plenary meeting.

We take note of the draft decision circulated under symbol CD/WP.635 on 28 July 2021 by the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament on behalf of the current presidency of the Conference, on the proposal for linguistic and technical updates to the rules of procedure of the Conference to reflect equality between men and women. My delegation participated in the informal consultations held on 3 August, which were convened by the Canadian presidency in order to debate the issue at hand, and in view of this, we would like to take the opportunity to make some comments.

My delegation takes note of the efforts of the Canadian presidency and the team led by Ambassador Norton, who, together with the other Presidents for the 2021 session, has helped in various ways to carry forward the activities of the Conference by holding thematic debates. In the absence of a programme of work, these thematic debates become forums for dialogue. It is nevertheless regrettable that in the last three years the Conference has not been capable of agreeing on a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that genuinely takes account of disarmament priorities, and that its work has thus degenerated into that of a merely deliberative body, thereby deviating from its mandate to negotiate legally binding instruments on the subject of disarmament.

With regard to the issue of equality between men and women, as my delegation has already indicated, the position of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is to support gender equity and equality. The gender perspective is a coherent, cross-cutting State policy that does not relate to a single agenda. The promotion of gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women and peoples are vehicles of progress and development. My country, which is currently facing serious challenges as a result of the application of illegal unilateral coercive measures by the United States Government, has extensive public policies and some of the most advanced legislation in Latin America and the Caribbean in the area of women's rights, particularly in the area of gender equality and equity. By way of example, almost 40 per cent of our Cabinet is represented by women.

We have listened with due attention to the comments and legitimate concerns expressed by member States with respect to the proposal presented by the President and, as we see it, the linguistic and technical update of the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament is not a problem of making them gender-neutral or reflecting equality between men and women. The issue of overcoming the stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament goes beyond gender-neutrality, it goes beyond a problem of drafting. We consider that all presidencies have the right to be treated equally and to fully carry out their functions, in accordance with the rules of procedure, as members of the Conference on Disarmament and, as we have already stated, a clear illustration of the fact that the Conference rules of procedure are not the fundamental problem of the Conference is that the presidency of this body is currently held by a woman, with full authority, and that the rules of procedure have not prevented her from occupying the presidency and carrying out her functions in full accord with the rules of procedure.

However, on carefully comparing the text of the draft decision presented by the Canadian presidency with the rules of procedure of the Conference in Spanish, we note some discrepancies. This draft decision has demonstrated that we must exercise caution in this process and over what should be changed in the rules of procedure, and how these technical and linguistic changes will affect translations into the other five official languages of the United Nations. In the interest of making a constructive contribution to the discussions, I would like to point to four examples in the rules of procedure – so as not to go through the entire text – which demonstrate the need for further discussion on the subject, if what we really want is for the rules to be gender-neutral.

For example, in the Spanish version, rule 4 says “*la delegación de cada Estado miembro de la Conferencia estará integrado por el jefe de la delegación*” (“the delegation of a member State of the Conference shall consist of a head of delegation”), using the masculine singular definite article “*el*” (“the”), and in the English version it simply says “a head of the delegation”, and does not insert the articles “*el jefe*” (“the head” (masculine)) or “*la jefa*” (“the head” (feminine)) of delegation. But this point is not reflected in the draft decision.

Next, rule 5 in the Spanish version of the rules of procedure states that “*cada delegación será acreditada mediante carta dirigida al Presidente de la Conferencia*

siguiendo instrucciones del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores del Estado miembro de que se trate” (“Each delegation shall be accredited by a letter on the authority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the member State, addressed to the President of the Conference”). The English version refers to “authority of the Minister”. We can see that there is no problem of gender-neutrality in the English version of the rules, but there is in the Spanish version. This rule is also not part of the draft decision presented to us.

As to rule 10, the Spanish version states that “*si el jefe de la delegación que ejerce la presidencia se halla en la imposibilidad de asistir podrá ser reemplazado por un miembro de su delegación*” (“if the head of the presiding delegation is unable to attend, he may be replaced by a member of his delegation”). At the beginning, the rule uses the masculine singular definite article “*el*” (“the”) to refer to the head of the delegation. In the second part, however, the word “*reemplazado*” (“replaced”) is used in the masculine, as a participle, which is the impersonal form of a verb – in this case the verb “*reemplazar*” (“to replace”) – and does not use the singular definite articles “*el*” (“the” (masculine)) or “*la*” (“the” (feminine)). And the English version says “function of the President” and then “he may be replaced by a member of his delegation”. There are discrepancies in the two versions, even in the use of “President” and “presidency”.

As to rule 37, the draft decision presents a revision to the English version of the rule to make it gender-neutral, but in the Spanish version the problem does not exist, since the rule is already gender-neutral. In view of the above, my delegation believes that this little exercise, looking at just four of the rules of procedure, shows that it is necessary to continue discussions in an inclusive and transparent manner. In our opinion, it would be wise to allow more time for deliberations and to find a more solid consensus among the members of the Conference on Disarmament.

Madam President, my delegation has maintained that it is not the revision of the rules of procedure and methods of work that has stalled the Conference on Disarmament, but rather the lack of political will on the part of some countries to move forward on the substantive agenda items. My country attaches great importance to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and considers it to be the sole multilateral negotiating forum of the international community for disarmament negotiations, as affirmed in the latest General Assembly resolution, and this places a special responsibility on the member States of this Conference.

The Conference on Disarmament, as an integral and vital part of the disarmament machinery, should be preserved and strengthened, allocating human and financial resources in this regard, and has in the past helped strengthen international agreements on arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, and the resumption of our work could contribute to the international community’s effort to build an international security architecture.

It is a matter of concern to my delegation that the only contribution the Conference can make to the international community is a linguistic and technical update of its rules of procedure to reflect equality between men and women. The unprecedented health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that there are other imminent global threats to international security that demand our attention. It also proves that the only way to address international security concerns is through a strengthened multilateral system that prioritizes cooperation in meeting new or persistent challenges, especially the risk of the use of nuclear weapons, since there is no possible preparation that would allow the world to deal with the enormity of the consequences of a detonation.

Tomorrow it will be 76 years since the United States used nuclear bombs on Hiroshima. The damaging and catastrophic effects of the radiation released can still be felt today. There is no human standard by which to measure the pain caused by the use of these bombs, and yet there is still a possibility of new, modern nuclear tests and attacks. The member States of the Conference should make greater efforts to ensure the relevance and importance of this multilateral forum. We therefore call on member States that are prepared to move forward on the basis of meaningful consensual agreements to pay proper attention to the underlying problems of international security, including nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Venezuela supports multilateral diplomacy, not only in the sphere of disarmament and non-proliferation but also in various fields in which attempts are being made to resolve the problems afflicting humanity. We believe that the members of this august body should make greater efforts to make up for lost time. The Conference on Disarmament must resume its mandate, it must find its way back to its rightful place on the international stage. Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for her statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Madam Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, esteemed colleagues, at the last meeting, which took place informally, we already put forward our arguments regarding the Australian initiative and endeavours to give effect to it at the Conference. I will not repeat what we said yesterday. I would just like to comment on what we have heard today.

We have again heard references in colleagues' statements to gender equality at the Conference. However, as was rightly pointed out here, all the practices of the Conference demonstrate that gender equality or gender discrimination is not a problem in this forum. We regard the raising of this topic as a shift of emphasis and an erroneous assessment of the Conference's actual gender policy.

The Russian Federation, as a responsible Conference participant, invariably abides by the principle of men and women's equal participation in the forum's work. Rest assured that our delegation will do all it can to curb any instances of gender discrimination in our forum. We see that this issue, which many people consider to be fundamentally a technical matter, of inserting adjustments into the rules of procedure, has already introduced an additional irritant into our work that is unlikely to promote the unity of the Conference or the greater trust of which the active supporters of amending the rules of procedure are such great advocates. What is more, the growth of trust will not be facilitated by leaking the contents of informal discussions and still less by the use of inappropriate judgmental language about States which have an alternative view of the situation.

Strangely, States which, like the Russian Federation, expressed their sovereign opinion at the previous meeting, are called "malign"—in other words, States which harbour doubts about the initiative and its implementation, about the expediency or usefulness of this initiative, and which urge that the focus be placed on more important problems, the remedying of which would really enable the forum to fulfil its mandate, these States are accused of adopting a sinister, hostile position. Is this not a manifestation of peculiar discrimination and disrespect for the position of other States? Is this not a blow to trust between delegations?

The opinion was even voiced here that the Conference's gender policy is somewhat a relic of the nineteenth century. We categorically disagree with that assertion. It does not correspond to reality. I will explain why.

Long before the Secretariat of the United Nations became active in the matter of gender equality, long before gender policy trended at international forums, first and foremost at the United Nations, the Conference on Disarmament pursued gender equality and the equal participation of all delegates in its work, irrespective of gender or gender balance. I therefore venture to say that, although this trend at the Conference has not yet been reflected in its rules of procedure, the Conference has long been in the van, has been a leader, with regard to matters of gender equality. Proof of this is the Canadian presidency in the person of the Ambassador of Canada and the presence here of Ms. Valovaya, the Secretary-General of the Conference.

Our delegation is outraged by the statement of Robert Wood, the Ambassador of the United States of America, that our position is an insult to the Secretary-General, the President and all other women present in the room and taking part in the discussion. We consider such outbursts inadmissible. They plainly harm interaction between delegations.

I again repeat that Russia is an unfailing advocate of the principle of gender equality at the Conference and strives to promote it by every means.

We therefore see that the initiative to discuss the insertion of so-called technical amendments into the rules of procedure has had the opposite of the desired effect. Instead of bolstering confidence, it patently reduces it.

However, we see a positive element in the discussions which have taken place. We thank the Canadian President for organizing them. The past two meetings have clearly revitalized the Conference.

And two more things. We have been presented only with an English-language version of a draft decision approving technical amendments to the rules of procedure. We have heard several statements in this room to the effect that these technical amendments require in-depth study to ensure that they are correctly reflected not only in English but also in other languages of the United Nations. We regard the fact that the draft decision was presented only in English as distinct discrimination against other official languages of the United Nations. We find both the initiative and the draft decision presented somewhat Anglocentric.

Lastly, I wished to take the floor a little earlier on a point of order. But I will now speak on it. I wish to remind delegations that the European Union is not a member of the Conference. I thank the representative of Slovenia for the statement on behalf of the European Union but would ask delegations to disregard it when considering this question.

In conclusion, I would like to say that we carefully listened to delegations' statements and agree with the opinion which has already been expressed that there is no prospect of consensus on the subject being discussed today. Furthermore, some new elements have emerged which require serious attention.

We do not rule out further work on this question and we again support the proposal made by the Ambassador of China yesterday that further work be done, with delegations, on the possible introduction of technical amendments to the rules of procedure. We believe that the introduction of the draft decision prepared by the Canadian presidency for delegations' approval is premature to say the least.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation for his intervention, and I now turn to the Ambassador of India. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Sharma (India): Madam President, thank you for placing on our agenda an important matter that requires the serious consideration of the Conference on Disarmament. In this context, my delegation would also like to express its sincere appreciation to Ambassador Sally Mansfield of Australia and the members of her team, who first proposed this technical and linguistic update. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference, and thank her for her inspiring remarks.

Madam President, you noted that 50 per cent of humanity is composed of women. If that is the case, how can we not reflect it in our rules of procedure? Seventy-four years ago, it was Hansa Jivraj Mehta, the Indian delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights from 1947 to 1948, who insisted on rephrasing the sentence "All men are born free and equal" to "All human beings are born free and equal" in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Following the same noble tradition, my delegation expressed its support for your proposal during the informal consultations convened by you on 3 August 2021.

Indian culture and society has always accorded the highest respect and place to women. One of the finest testimonies to this effect is reflected in the ancient Indian text that says "where women are worshipped, there exists the abode of gods". I am not asking this body to go to the extent of worshipping women; I am just appealing to it to reflect a small change that truly reflects their right place in the world and this body.

Madam President, I am not a linguist, but I do understand that when these pronouns of "he", "she" or "it" were constituted, they were aimed at recognizing the differences in people as well as people and objects and make our language richer and clearer. Somewhere down the line, perhaps for the brevity of language, we did away with these differences without realizing the implications it may have in the long term, but these are quite evident now, as also expressed by several delegations before me.

India believes that it is high time that we corrected this anomaly and reflected reality as it exists. Several delegations have referred to the presence of women leaders and delegates in this room. I myself have Ms. Subhashini Narayanan as India's alternate representative; I also owe this change to her. Going one step further, with three women at home, I wish to be able to go home today and tell them that I stood up for them and that if my daughter ever comes to this room, she will not be referred to as "he".

India would therefore like to reiterate its strong support for your proposal, Madam President, to bring our rules of procedure into line with both ancient Indian thought and contemporary norms. I hope that consensus can emerge on this important issue to enable us to effect this change, for, whatever we do, we must preserve our unity as well as consensus as a rule for decision-making.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Argentina.

Mr. Proffen (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Madam President. Argentina thanks you for circulating the draft decision contained in document CD/WP.635 and fully supports the proposal to update the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament to reflect the necessary gender parity and full equality between men and women.

Although it is a technical and linguistic update, the proposed amendment is of great importance and has a symbolic value of the first order. The Argentine delegation sees no reason to delay the adoption of this proposal and hopes that the necessary consensus will be reached to modify the rules of procedure of this Conference so that all language versions reflect the gender parity to which no one in this room seems to be opposed. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the delegate of Argentina for his statement, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Comberbach (Zimbabwe) (*via video link*): Thank you, Madam President, for your guidance of the work of the Conference on Disarmament. It is not an easy task, and we are sincerely grateful for your efforts. Warm greetings as well to Ms. Valovaya, the Secretary-General of the Conference, whom I would like to thank for being here and for her important intervention earlier today.

As several speakers have commented, this issue of gender-neutralizing the rules of procedure should be a very straightforward process. None of those who have intervened on the issue, either this morning or during the informal session convened on 3 August, have spoken against the proposed amendments. Indeed, most have rightly welcomed, albeit with some nuances here and there, the principle of dragging the rules of procedure into the twenty-first century. Likewise, and as per our intervention on 3 August, Zimbabwe has no objection in principle to the proposed amendments, which are fully in line with important provisions of our national Constitution and its requirements for full gender equality in all spheres of life within our country.

Once again, we take careful note of your assurances – echoed today by several other speakers – that these are purely technical and linguistic amendments, and that in no way do they constitute some form of Trojan horse by which other unrelated agendas might be introduced, the so-called Pandora's box scenario.

As unlikely as this might seem, the fact that a number of delegations have voiced such concerns is a sad reflection of the lack of confidence and trust that most unfortunately continues to bedevil our work and to prevent the Conference from returning to its important negotiating mandate. Those concerns are a reality which we have to bear in mind as we consider this issue. To the extent that these proposed amendments might help, albeit in a very small way, rebuild that confidence and trust within our ranks, and to the extent that they do not in any way further complicate the already complex situation within our ranks, then we believe it is a worthwhile proposal meriting further consideration in the search for a consensus position.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Zimbabwe for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*via video link, spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Madam President. The informal consultations held by the Conference on Disarmament the day before yesterday provided an important opportunity for exchanging views and positions among member States on the linguistic update proposed by the presidency of the Conference. The consultations demonstrated that there is a lack of consensus regarding the President's proposals and that the issue is not as simple as some people contend, since it cannot be separated from the context in which the Conference operates. The Conference is in fact witnessing a chronic inability to address the core issues on its agenda, and this shortcoming cannot be resolved by focusing on non-essential technical issues that cannot yield tangible results capable of breaking the Conference deadlock.

The complexity of the topic was confirmed during the informal consultations, when member States speaking the six official United Nations languages highlighted the disparity of the impact of the proposed English amendments to the Conference's rules of procedure on the other official United Nations languages. This is also applicable to the Arabic language, which has very clear rules governing femininity and masculinity.

Madam President, I wish to reiterate that the equality of men and women is a lofty principle that Syria supports in all United Nations forums, including the Conference on Disarmament. However, we do not believe that the rules of procedure of the Conference pose a fundamental problem that must be addressed and resolved by a Conference decision. It should be noted in this context that there has been no gender-based discrimination against the holders of the presidency of the Conference. On the other hand, there has been discrimination on political grounds in the past during the presidency of a number of member States. There were attempts to obstruct and boycott the President's work, in violation of the rules of procedure of the Conference.

Madam President, we therefore believe that the issue under discussion is not a priority for the Conference, which must focus on negotiations concerning legal instruments that address substantive agenda issues and on achieving long-awaited progress in the field of disarmament.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the Russian delegate for raising a point of order regarding the participation of the European Union. I support what he said in that regard. It should be noted that Syria raised the issue in 2018 and requested explanations from the Conference secretariat, but no convincing explanations have yet been received. Thank you, Madam President.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement. I now give the floor to the delegate of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo Miño (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much. My delegation appreciates the presence at this meeting of the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament. At the same time, it wishes to congratulate you, Madam President, for your important work during this session of the Conference on Disarmament.

I will be very brief. My delegation shares the arguments expressed by several delegations in favour of the initiative presented by the delegation of Canada, as President of the Conference on Disarmament, and circulated for our consideration. It also wishes to thank the delegation of Australia for initiating this important process.

We consider that this initiative is not only necessary and timely but also indispensable and that it reflects the need for human behaviour that is more in tune with the reality of our times. In short, it is a matter of equity and principle. Consequently, my delegation wishes to reiterate and register its full support for and commitment to the proposal contained in the draft decision under consideration today. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the delegate of Ecuador for his statement, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Madam President. Good morning, Madam Secretary-General, good morning, colleagues.

Before addressing the issue before us today, I would like to raise a procedural point regarding the comment made by our colleague from Russia on the statement of the European

Union. I would like to start by saying, through you, Madam President, that the Russian Federation is well aware that the European Union is not only an international organization in its own right. It is also a group of countries in this room, just as the Group of 21 is a group of countries. The 27 members of the European Union mandated Slovenia to deliver the statement made earlier. That is our sovereign right. That is why this statement of the European Union must appear in the official record of our meeting.

I would like to encourage the Russian delegation to reread the rules of procedure. If the rule did not allow such statements, we would have to delete all the statements made by the Group of 21 in the past and today.

On the issue occupying us today, Madam President, Madam Secretary-General, I would first like to thank you because, as you know, gender issues are crucial for my country, both at the national level and in multilateral forums.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. We reiterate our full and principled support for the goal of supplementing the male titles and functions of our rules of procedure with their female equivalents simultaneously in all the official languages where the issue arises.

In that respect, France fully endorses the arguments put forward by other delegations before me. Firstly, the proposed amendments are technical changes, pure and simple. Adding the female equivalent to the male version of titles and functions is nothing more than correcting what should appear to us like a simple typographical error.

Secondly, many multilateral forums before us have already made similar corrections to their documents. There is no reason why the Conference on Disarmament should not do the same. This should be considered a mere formality.

Thirdly, if we need to make these amendments, it is also because, as we know and as has been stated by several delegations, our language, whether that is English, French, Chinese, Arabic or Russian, shapes the way we see the world. Writing “Madam President”, “Madam Secretary-General” or “Madam Head of Delegation” shows our attachment to the values of inclusiveness.

To those who would argue that the current rules of procedure do not prevent us from using any language we want when speaking, what will we say to the students and academics who learn about our Conference through written sources? What will we say to the members of younger generations who would like to embark on a diplomatic career and discover in the founding documents of the Conference the anachronism it is currently caught in?

In our disarmament forums, my country, France, will always campaign for inclusiveness. This morning we have heard some delegations highlight the values of gender equality while also rejecting the proposal to immediately correct our rules of procedure. That is obviously a blatant contradiction which, beyond this subject, is fomenting a climate of mistrust at the Conference. Ironically, the same delegations are decrying the atmosphere of mistrust which they themselves are encouraging through their contradictory statements on this subject.

In response to the delegations that are of the view that this is not the right time to deal with these amendments, I would say that a quarter of a century ago, in the days when the Conference was functional, substantive discussions and technical discussions were addressed at the same time. There is no contradiction in handling both issues in parallel. I will ask them this question through you, Madam President. How much more time must we wait before we think about acting?

In response to the delegations that think that the amendments are being proposed to create the impression that the Conference is working, I would say: yes, the Conference is working and, what is more, it is committed to working in step with the times it finds itself in.

Finally, in response to the delegations that think that the rules of procedure as they are today have never led to discrimination against women, I would ask them, in that case why not make the documents consistent with practice?

We have lived under obsolete rules of procedure for too long. We urgently call for the female equivalents of the male functions and titles to be added. Otherwise, it could be said that the Conference claims to work towards global peace and security but itself excludes from its decision-making circle no less than half of all humanity.

I have read the statement prepared by my delegation and approved by my capital. I would like to put it to one side and make some very personal comments and put across some of my emotions. I know that diplomacy is not done with emotions. We all know that. However, this time, just this once, I will venture to convey some of what I feel.

You are getting to know me, I like to take things with a bit of humour, but this time I am really not in the mood. I think the discussion we are witnessing is not funny. Not funny at all. I left this room on Tuesday feeling ashamed as a man, not as the Permanent Representative of France, but as a man. This morning I will be leaving this room with the same feeling of shame. I would just like to send a message to the women in this room and outside it. Keep fighting. You will win that fight sooner or later and the handful of delegations that oppose this historic movement are fighting a rearguard action, which they will lose. Sooner or later. That is clear. So, stay confident, we will get there. This is not only a battle for women. It is a battle for women and for men. I am a man and I am strongly committed to the fight for inclusiveness.

Thank you, Madam President, and I apologize to the women.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France for his statement and give the floor to the delegate of Pakistan.

Mr. Omar (Pakistan): Madam President, thank you for convening this plenary meeting. We also thank Secretary-General Valovaya for her valuable remarks. My delegation has already shared its views during the informal meeting that you convened on Tuesday, and we have listened carefully to the discussions. Let me briefly share a few points.

It is encouraging to note that all delegations attach importance to this topic. Similarly, it is encouraging that the pursuit of equality of women and men is a shared objective for the Conference on Disarmament members. It is also clear that while the equality goal is an agreed cause, there are diverse views on the ways and means to achieve this goal. In essence, the divergence is about modalities and other practical considerations related to the proposal. For the record, let me restate that my delegation is supportive of the spirit of your proposal. We appreciate the efforts that you and others have made in advancing the objective of equality.

The discussions held in the informal plenary were useful. We propose that such deliberations should continue with a view to bridging the divisions and evolving consensus on the proposal. I assure you of my delegation's constructive engagement in the process.

The President: I thank the delegate of Pakistan for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Thank you, Madam President. The Chinese delegation joins other delegations in welcoming Secretary-General Valovaya to today's plenary meeting.

We participated actively in the discussions at the informal plenary on 3 August and listened carefully to the statements made by delegations at that meeting and at today's meeting. We believe that these discussions confirm the clear consensus among the member States of the Conference on Disarmament on two points: first, that all member States attach great importance to the issue of gender equality and are committed to actively practising it in the Conference and in other multilateral settings; and second, that the rules of procedure themselves have never led to gender discrimination over the decades that the Conference has been in existence. Gender discrimination has not been, is not and will not be an issue in the work of the Conference in practice.

China believes that the two meetings held on 3 and 5 August, and chaired by Madam President at the request of member States, provided a very good opportunity for all parties to fully express their views on the rules of procedure and the issue of gender representation. The two important points of consensus among member States that I have just mentioned were

further clarified and strengthened through those discussions. These two points of consensus can be formally recorded as the principal conclusion of those meetings.

With regard to the draft decision proposed by Madam President, it was recognized through the discussions that the technical amendments made to the English-language version of the rules of procedure alone could not simply be applied to the other versions in the six working languages of the United Nations. Different conditions obtain in the various language versions, requiring them to be treated differently.

In the light of this situation, the secretariat has been requested to propose a comprehensive and suitable proposal on whether and how technical adjustments should be made to the various versions of the rules of procedure. The six Presidents of the Conference would then take the lead in further communication with the member States and patiently explore solutions. It would then be up to the member States to discuss whether a decision should be adopted in this regard, as well as what kind of decision would be possible for us to adopt. One thing is clear: there is no need for us to allow a non-existent issue to cause conflict or even division among the member States.

Consensus is the soul of the work of the Conference on Disarmament, embodying the equality of and mutual respect among its member States as well as their highly assiduous approach vis-à-vis the security interests of all States and the work of the Conference. There are three prerequisites for the work of the Conference to proceed on a consensus basis: first, that member States are fully consulted; second, that the views of all parties are fully respected; and third, that there is a genuine need to take the decision concerned.

Needless to say, the issue of politicization has seriously affected the working atmosphere of the Conference over the past few years. We hope that henceforth, all parties will be committed to firmly opposing politicized tendencies and practices; to rebuilding mutual trust on the basis of equality and mutual respect; and to giving full attention and treatment to the positions, concerns, opinions and proposals of different member States. The atmosphere in which the Conference works can and should develop in a healthier direction, which will greatly facilitate every aspect of its work.

Madam President, like the Ambassador of India, I also have a daughter. Her name is Grace, and she has a dream that she can also become an Ambassador Li when she grows up. I've told her, "if you want to become an Ambassador Li, you can start by working as an intern in the Conference secretariat." After today's meeting concludes, I will tell Grace that the door of the Conference is open wide for her. Thank you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Australia.

Ms. Hill (Australia): Thank you very much, Madam President, for convening this meeting today, and can I, in particular, convey my delegation's thanks to you and your delegation for all your work on taking this issue forward. I would also like to join others in acknowledging the presence earlier of Madam Valovaya and to thank her for her very strong support for the proposal we are discussing today; it does indeed send a strong signal. More broadly, I would like to thank all of the delegations that have spoken today and that spoke on Tuesday to express their strong support for this proposal. It is very clear from these discussions that the overwhelming majority of delegations are supportive of this proposal. Indeed, in 2021, it is very difficult to see how anyone could not support this proposal. The changes do no more than reflect a reality. And from what I have heard today and on Tuesday from Conference on Disarmament members, no one disagrees with the intent of the proposal.

Indeed, it is the sort of obvious change that, as Secretary-General Valovaya said so very well, should be as automatic as correcting a spelling mistake, and this was certainly the thinking of my delegation when we first raised the proposal under our presidency last year. To us, the need for the change to the rules was clear. And in this regard I would like to make some observations about some of the points that we have heard today and in particular the point that we heard that gender has never been an issue in the Conference on Disarmament and no one interprets the rules in a discriminatory way – I think this is a very important point to reflect on, because the problem is, they can only be interpreted in a discriminatory way.

The plain meaning of “he”, “him” and “his” in English does not include women. There is no way to interpret those terms other than as referring to men. The only way to read the rules in a non-discriminatory way is to reinterpret them to see something that is not there. And on what other issue would we accept a situation where we agree to see something in the rules that is not there? And why does this matter? It matters because the rules of procedure are our guiding document: they give our work structure; they articulate the principles underpinning our work. It is for this reason, quite simply, that my delegation wants all Conference on Disarmament delegates to be able to see themselves in the rules without having to reinterpret them. I would like to see myself reflected in the rules and I am sure my female colleagues would, too. Why would we reinterpret the rules when it is so simple to change them? A simple decision to amend the rules by consensus is all that is required. It is within our power to deliver that change today. And in doing so, we would make the chance of future proposals to amend the rules of procedure passing no more or less likely than before.

I would also like to address some of the comments that we have heard today about the various language versions of the rules. I confess that I am not a linguist and do not have the technical understanding of what is required in that respect, but I would like to reiterate that today we are not talking about the technical language aspects of the different language versions. We are talking about a principle, and the principle is a very clear one and one which I hear everyone supports.

I would also like to address the comment that the change we make today would need to do much more than it purports to do, that it would need to somehow present as solving the challenges that this body faces. It does not, it needs to do no more or less than it purports to do.

I would also like to address the issue of consensus. It is indeed the case that all members’ interests are protected by the consensus rule. But I think it is important that we all acknowledge that with that comes a responsibility to consider proposals on their merits and ask whether adopting them would serve our interests. This includes our shared interest in the Conference as an institution. My delegation firmly believes that diversity and inclusion are directly relevant to the Conference’s capacity to fulfil its mandate and to its strength as an institution. A consensus decision on the proposal today would clearly demonstrate this body’s respect for those principles.

In concluding, I would just like to offer the reflection that there is a significant degree of interest in what we are discussing here today, within the disarmament community and much more broadly. I would also like to thank our distinguished colleagues, including those from India and France, for reminding us that there is also a dimension of this at the personal level. I, too, would like to go home today to tell my daughter that the body that her mother has the great privilege of representing her country in made a significant decision today; a decision to change the rules to reflect the fact that her mother is indeed a “she”, not a “he”, and in doing so, the fact that her mother is welcome in the Conference is not just accepted as a matter of practice but is written into the rules.

The President: My apologies to those who are online and did not hear – there was a bit of a distracting noise of knuckle-banging on desks after the delegate of Australia spoke. I thank the delegate of Australia for her statement, and I now turn to the delegate of Angola. Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Santos (Angola) (*spoke in French*): Good morning, Madam Secretary-General, Madam President and colleagues. Since this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor at this forum, Madam President, please allow me to congratulate you and your team.

Regarding the work undertaken during your presidency, in particular the linguistic review of the rules of the procedure, in view of the long and in-depth discussions on the subject we will not spend time on longer considerations because we think all possible relevant considerations on this topic have already been presented.

However, as a woman, and on behalf of a country that defends strong values and policies of women’s inclusion, I would like to assure you of our full support.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the delegate of Angola for her statement and give the floor to the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): As I said in my previous statement, I thank the President for organizing these two meetings since they have clearly reinvigorated the thought process and work of the Conference on Disarmament.

I would like to revert to or comment on some points. We have heard a number of statements here which certainly rank as masterpieces of the art of oratory. However, unfortunately, they contained plainly manipulative elements of no relevance to the substance of the question we are discussing here, or to the Conference's work or activities. Obviously, the Russian Federation is also worried about the next generations and their delicate psyche, but it seems to me that this is not the subject of our forum's discussions.

It was mentioned here that the interpretation of the rules of procedure is not fully in line with the text as it stands, that interpretation is insufficient, that it is necessary to reflect tendencies, realities and so forth literally. Probably, formally, such a position is correct, but I would point out that any text has not only letters but also spirit and, over the past few decades, the Conference and delegations have proceeded not only from the letter but also from the spirit of the rules of procedure. The spirit of the rules of procedure is that they are really the basic document regulating the Conference, which was specifically drawn up to ensure the effectiveness of the Conference's work. Effectiveness must be secured by the equal participation of all delegations and all representatives of the States parties to the Conference, irrespective of gender. For that reason, it is very important to abide by the spirit of the text and to interpret it correctly, which we have managed to do over the last decades.

But if we are to give priority to the letter of a legal document, then we can say that we are simply obliged to sprinkle ashes on our head and say that for the last 20 years we have been breaching the rules of procedure, because women do not figure in the rules if we go by the letter, only the letter, of the text. I would therefore be extremely, extremely cautious and meticulous when speculating about the linguistic features of the rules of procedure.

One more point. In answer to what was said by my colleague the Ambassador of France, since doubt has been cast on my qualifications, I would like to ask the secretariat for clarification of the following question. Is there any regional European Union group at the Conference? As far as I know three groups have been set up within the Conference: the Eastern European Group, the Group of 21 and the Group of One (China acting alone, having the status of a separate group). Perhaps in the last two years something has happened at the Conference of which we are unaware and to which the Ambassador of France has drawn our attention?

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Ju Yong-chol (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Madam President, my delegation appreciates your efforts to reflect gender equality in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. However, listening carefully to the statements made by the representatives of many countries during Tuesday's informal discussion and today's meeting, we can clearly see the conflicting reactions to the proposed decision.

My delegation is of the view that any decision adopted in this chamber should enjoy the support of each and every member State, as the rules of procedure of the Conference state that the Conference shall adopt its decisions by consensus. Thus, agreement on any issue can be resolved through further consultations taking into account various opinions to find the best solution acceptable to everyone. Hastening the adoption of a decision in disregard of the concerns expressed by some States will widen the differences among the States and affect the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement.

Colleagues, the list of speakers is now exhausted, and I am wondering whether any other delegation would like to take the floor before I pass the floor to the secretariat. I give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Madam President, I just wanted to come back on the procedural point which has been raised again by the Russian Federation.

I, too, have reread the rules of procedure and the Group of 21, the Group of Western European and Other States, the Group of Eastern European States and China do not appear as groups in the rules of procedure. That is a fact. It is a practice. What bothers me is that I get the impression that the Russian Federation has just discovered the political existence of the European Union. That is really something new. I must say that I thought the Russian Federation had paid more attention over the past 50 years, but apparently not.

The European Union exists. It is an established political group which speaks at all multilateral forums without any difficulty. Regarding the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament, they must be fully taken into account, fully respected. We have the sovereign right to mandate a European Union country to speak on our behalf. That is a fact. It is not a violation of any provision of the rules of procedure. We have done this in the past dozens of times, hundreds of times, at the Conference.

There you go, I think, honestly, we are wasting time. We can continue discussing this and ask the secretariat to do the analysis, but we have other things to do. Good grief!

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France for his statement.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like, at this point, to turn to the secretariat for some clarification on a couple of issues that have been raised. I would like to invite the secretariat to comment on questions to do with the other official language versions of the rules of procedure, and also on the issue of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Ms. Mercogliano (Acting Secretary of the Conference on Disarmament): Indeed, there has been more than one question pertaining to the issue of translation of the rules of procedure and the eventual amendment of the rules of procedure in languages other than English. We in the secretariat, of course, had to inquire about these issues, not being ourselves linguists. We inquired with the Division of Conference Management and the Languages Service, and we were told that it is a matter of practice that negotiations take place in one language. It is not possible or feasible to negotiate in six languages. It goes without saying that all the other languages will be adjusted accordingly, as per the outcome of the negotiations. And it also goes without saying that it is for United Nations translators, as the exclusive authority, to translate the outcome according to United Nations standards.

This is, of course, to avoid situations in which, for instance, the same language could be spoken in different parts of the world and different words may be used. We have received assurances that the United Nations translators more than welcome suggestions, which is what the delegation of Spain has made; what it has prepared has been sent to the linguistic services of the United Nations. We have also been assured that they will respect the principle that is behind the decision taken by the intergovernmental body.

This also answers the question raised by, I think, the Ambassador of Nigeria, who asked about the text in Chinese or in other languages. Changes will be made where necessary. Some language versions will require more changes. The delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela mentioned that the Ambassador of France said yesterday that there may be versions that do not require changes or require very small changes, but that is definitely not for the Conference on Disarmament secretariat to say, because we do not have the competence to do so. I think this should clarify the issue of languages.

With reference to the issue brought up by the representative of the Russian Federation – that the floor was given to the representative of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union – I would like to point out that the floor was given to an observer of the Conference and that observers have the right to take the floor; and, as a matter of practice, the rotating presidency of the European Union has also spoken for the European Union itself. We do not think we have done anything differently from what has been done for years, but we stand to be corrected.

The President: I thank the secretariat for that clarification. I note that there are two speakers who have asked for the floor. I am going to give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands first.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): Thank you, President. I will stick to the issue at hand and not deal with the other issues that have been introduced just now.

We have heard from many delegations today, and also from the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament; as a matter of principle, all have expressed support for the equality of men and women in the Conference. We have also heard some delegations express concerns and ask a number of questions. But I have heard no delegation disagree with the main objective of this exercise, which is about the inclusion of women in the work of the Conference, or with the substance of the draft decision that the secretariat circulated on behalf of the President.

May I ask you then, Madam President, to put the question to the room, to see whether there are indeed delegations opposed to updating the English-language version of the rules of procedure as proposed in the draft decision you have circulated, so that we can adopt the decision and end this discussion. With respect to the language and the different versions, I think the secretariat was very clear about this and I fully agree with what was said; it is up to the secretariat and the translators to make the necessary updates in other languages.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his intervention and proposal, and I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I apologize for taking the floor again. I will be brief.

First, the Russian delegation and the Russian Federation never under any circumstances, previously, now or in the future, cast, casts or will cast doubt on the existence of the European Union or of other unions of States, of which there are several dozen. That is the first thing.

Secondly, we never questioned the right of an observer to address the Conference on Disarmament. However, we hold that observers are speaking in their national capacity and not as representatives of any group of States. This is definitely the Conference's practice.

Thirdly, the fact that the European Union is not mentioned in the rules of procedure but that, for several years, its representatives have had the right to voice the European Union's position is very significant. We can draw a parallel between this situation and the situation with regard to the participation of women in the Conference's work. There really is no mention of women in the rules of procedure and yet they have taken part in the Conference's work with equal rights to men for many years. That said, the representatives of the European Union are not demanding that the rules of procedure be changed in order to reflect the reality of the European Union's participation in the Conference's work, yet the issue of women arises for some reason. In both cases, there is established practice. The Russian Federation has never opposed this practice, although it could. If the letter of the rules of procedure were followed, our objections would be justified. Why do such largely similar situations have a completely different effect for us? Why is it necessary so persistently to employ one practice in the rules of procedure and disregard the other practices which we also follow in the Conference's work?

Lastly, on the suggestion of my colleague from the Netherlands: obviously, the situation now, after these discussions about the adoption of a decision on technical amendments to the rules of procedure is complex and far from a consensus. I therefore ask the presidency not to submit the draft decision it has prepared for delegations' approval.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the United States of America.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): Madam President, I am taking the floor to second the request made by the Dutch Ambassador.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cleobury (United Kingdom): My delegation would also like to support the proposal made by the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

The President: I thank the delegate of the United Kingdom for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Madam President, my delegation has expressed its clear and unambiguous support for your proposal. However, we have heard delegations that asked for more time or said that they are not ready to adopt the decision, and I think we must respect their opinion. It happens in many multilateral forums that the President has been given the authority to consult delegations and find ways out. In the case of the Chemical Weapons Convention, there is a 24-hour rule. There are also other forums in which we have such rules, where the President undertakes informal consultations. To date, from this discussion as well as from the informal discussions, we gather very clearly that there is no consensus, though I am not saying that we must not build consensus.

The Ambassador of China mentioned that we must at all costs avoid the politicization of this body. This body is politicized enough and I do not think we are doing any great service by putting this decision to a vote. My suggestion would be – and we have full faith in your wisdom, Madam President – that you should not put this to a vote, because we need to end this practice whereby Presidents, having assessed that there is no consensus, put a decision to the vote to embarrass delegations or to “expose” them. I think we must refrain from such practices.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India for his intervention, and I turn now to the delegate of Germany. Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Mikeska (Germany): In light of the explanations that the secretariat has given us on the various language versions, we would also like to support the proposal of our colleague from the Netherlands.

The President: I thank the delegate of Germany for her intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Madam President, I support the proposal of our colleague from the Netherlands.

I think there is no politicization involved in putting the draft decision to the vote. I think it is simply a matter of having clarity on the delegations’ positions because I, like the members of some other delegations, think that those positions are not being clearly expressed today.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Ambassador of France and give the floor to the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Ali Abadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Ironically, the national constitutions of those delegations that passionately support this amendment, or so-called linguistic update, also use the same terms and wording when referring to the officials of their country. Does this mean that their constitutions are based on discrimination? I just made a search in the English version of the constitutions of some delegations that are pushing on this issue here in these meetings. They use exactly the same wording that we are discussing here, so we need to avoid politicizing this meeting. What is clear is that, on gender equality within the Conference on Disarmament, there is consensus; no one objected, and my delegation – not now, not before, not in the future – has no objection to the full participation of women and men equally in the deliberations at the meetings and in presiding over its work and so on.

But on the necessity of opening and changing the rules of procedure, there are divergent views and, as was clear in the informal consultations and in this plenary formal meeting, there is no consensus on this draft proposed decision.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement, and I give the floor now to the Ambassador of Japan.

Mr. Ogasawara (Japan): Madam President, with respect to the proposal made by the Dutch Ambassador, I would just like to inform you that I have already been instructed by my Government to join the consensus in favour of the draft decision which you have been circulating – that is, if its adoption is proposed by you.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Japan for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of China.

Mr. Li Song (China): Madam President, I do not believe that we need another round of statements to indicate our positions and preferences, because, over the two rounds of meetings, I think each and every delegation that is in a position to express its positions and ideas has already very clearly expressed its views. So I fully agree with the suggestion made by the Ambassador of India; I also strongly encourage the President of the Conference and the six presidencies of this session – or even future presidencies – to continue with consultations.

Having listened to all the views expressed over these two meetings, I think the consensus position on the part of Conference on Disarmament members regarding gender neutrality has already been reaffirmed and enhanced; and on the basis of this consensus, I believe that we are in an even better position to address this issue through presidential consultations. And, frankly speaking, I really don't believe that we need more conference services resources for this purpose – we can do this through consultations. I also believe that, for colleagues who have daughters, we can all of us go home and tell our daughters that the door of the Conference on Disarmament has always been wide open for them.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of China for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Díaz Mendoza (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Madam President. First of all, I would like to concur with the comments of the Ambassador of China and the Ambassador of India. It is evident – and it has been made clear that there is no need to go on to another round of comments – that the problem is not equity or making the rules gender-neutral. No one can be against that. Even I, as a representative of my country, have that right. However, my own delegation has shown that there are other rules, at least in Spanish, that are not properly gender-neutral. It seems to me that with this draft decision, if it is adopted, we will only be rewording or updating five rules of procedure in English, without taking account of the rules in the other languages.

I think it seems only fair, in support of multilingualism, that we look at the versions in the other languages as well. I believe it is necessary to make a much more wide-ranging study of how to proceed on this matter. I think we are on the right road and that these discussions have served to confirm that there are indeed some rules that must be adjusted to reflect our reality and our time, but in our view, to take a decision on a text that in effect – at least as far as the Spanish version is concerned – will not correspond, because, for example, as I have already indicated, rule 37 need not be changed and yet there are other rules, not included in this text, which should be reviewed. How is this going to look in the future, when we look at the rules, and how am I going to explain that some rules were adopted and not others? I want the discussions to go on; my delegation could make a positive contribution on the subject, and I hope that all the concerns expressed here by all delegations will be taken into consideration. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for her intervention, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Argentina.

Ms. Porta (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Madam President. My delegation would like to associate itself with the request made by the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

The President: I thank the delegate of Argentina for her intervention, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Mexico.

Ms. Martínez Liévano (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Madam President. I think what we have heard here is a consensus that there is a need for rules of procedure that are gender-neutral. Judging by what several delegates have stated, which is that that should be the spirit of the rules of procedure, I believe that we have a consensus for amendment of the rules. The specific adjustments of language in other versions, or the specific wording to be used in other languages, have, I think, already been clarified by the secretariat; they will be discussed afterwards, as is the practice in any United Nations body when negotiating a resolution or a document. In that sense, I believe that we should support the proposal

presented by the Netherlands, and if anyone has a formal objection on the substance of the matter, he or she can express it. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of Mexico for her intervention, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Egypt.

Mr. Elsayed (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Madam President.

(*spoke in English*)

“Madam President” is how we say it in Arabic. It will never change, Madam President, even if we adopt the decision that you presented today.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I shall continue in Arabic. I usually speak English to ensure that I am clearly understood, but since language is an important component of our current discussion, I shall continue to speak in Arabic.

In fact, I had not intended to speak at all today, since the subject matter is quite clear and does not require any expression of opinion or any elaboration in expressing support and presenting my country’s positions on women and gender-based equality. The Conference on Disarmament is not the appropriate forum for this discussion, since the issue is addressed in other forums.

On a personal level, I belong to the fathers’ team, since I have two daughters and I work hard every day to provide them with a bright future.

Secondly, I wish to express my full support for the issue under discussion in both my national and personal capacity. However, I also wish to support the Conference on Disarmament, the forum in which we are assembled today. The current discussions and deliberations unfortunately illustrate the level of mistrust that exists between delegations. I have no doubt about the noble intentions and goals underlying the submission of this proposal, and I commend the delegation of Australia as well as you, Madam President, and the delegation of Canada on your efforts. We believe and have no doubt whatsoever that such efforts stem from sound and noble intentions. I nevertheless invite all my colleagues to take a step back, to set matters right and to take a close look at the situation in which we find ourselves. Is this really what we want to do? Will this improve the atmosphere in the Conference on Disarmament? Will it bring about positive developments for either men or women? I fully agree with the Ambassador of India that it is necessary to take into account the concerns of all delegations and to refrain from any attempt to use this noble and important topic, which we all support, to press charges against a few delegations or a single delegation or to achieve a false victory in a false battle.

I leave it to you, Madam President. I am fully confident in your ability to manage our proceedings in a manner that will allow us, at least in the years ahead, to resume our work and fulfil the mandate of the Conference.

The President: I thank the delegate of Egypt for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of Spain.

Mr. Manglano Aboín (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Madam President. I take the floor again to clarify that my delegation, which is, shall we say, an interested party in the linguistic issue, in the issue of the different versions, reiterates that we are here to deal with a matter of principle, which is gender equality. As the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament has clearly explained, the issue of translations and how this principle will be transferred to the different versions is a later step in which, as has been explained to us, the translators will take into account the spirit of the amendment. For all these reasons, we support the proposal put forward by the delegation of the Netherlands.

The President: I thank the delegate of Spain for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Comberbach (Zimbabwe) (*via video link*): Again, just let me state that we have absolutely no objection in principle to the proposed amendments. This should be a simple matter. But very clearly, as the debate has shown, it is not as straightforward as it should be.

We have to note that there is no consensus on the issue and we would therefore, with great respect, advise great caution against taking any premature or precipitate action on this. The representative of Egypt expressed it very, very clearly and very well; I think that for us to move now, and in so doing to ignore or just bypass the positions expressed by a number of delegations, will almost certainly further complicate the work of this forum. We support the position expressed by, I think, the representative of India, that is: let's give ourselves more time. Let the President – you, Madam – and the six presidencies of this session continue holding consultations on the issue and help us move towards a consensus position, something which brings us together and which addresses the issues of confidence, or which can help to address the issues of confidence and trust rather than work in an opposite direction.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Zimbabwe for his statement, and I now turn to the Ambassador of India. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Sharma (India): Madam President, if I am not mistaken, today we are in a formal plenary and the views expressed by delegations are a matter of record. They can be checked in the verbatim records, so I do not think we need to hear their positions again to be on record. Therefore, Madam President, I would once again appeal to you to keep this proposal on the table. Otherwise, I am afraid that if we precipitate the situation we might actually be digging the grave of such an important proposal. I think it needs serious consideration in future, so that we can adopt it at some future point of time.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India for his statement, and I now pass the floor to the delegate of Australia.

Ms. Hill (Australia): Madam President, I speak just to add my delegation's voice of support to the proposal from the delegation of the Netherlands.

The President: I thank the delegate of Australia for her intervention, and I now turn to the Ambassador of Germany. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): I have listened to the debate today, and from my point of view, we have a very tricky problem ahead of us now. Either you will have to relinquish your presidency immediately, Madam President – or you would never have entered into the presidency as a woman, because rule 10 of the rules of procedure leads of necessity to the conclusion that only men can hold the position of President – or we agree with what my Russian colleague has argued, that we need to go by the spirit of the text or by the spirit and the intention of delegations. And the intention as expressed by everybody in the room who spoke here was that there should be no discrimination against women – everybody spoke in favour of the equality of men and women.

It would necessarily follow that of course you are rightfully in the chair and that of course on the strength of what the secretariat explained with regard to linguistic issues – that the translation services and the secretariat would amend the rules of procedure in each of the official languages accordingly – and since I cannot believe that anybody in the room here would not want you to continue your function, the second option is the only one. So there actually is consensus: there is no need to take any decision because it has already been taken and the secretariat has the simple role, together with the translators, of amending the rules of procedure to reflect the will of the Conference on Disarmament. I hope that this is the course of action we will take.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Germany for his statement and am going to turn off the microphone for a moment.

The meeting was suspended at 12.55 p.m. and resumed at 1 p.m.

The President: I would like to begin by thanking all colleagues for the various interventions that you have made. There has been a lot of food for thought put on the table and, just a minute or so before we would normally have adjourned this meeting, the Ambassador of Germany has added another element to the table.

The issue is that the secretariat needs to be tasked formally by the Conference on Disarmament to undertake further work. Everyone has pointed out that we have not heard any objections to the principle of equality between men and women in the Conference on

Disarmament; in fact, I think we have all heard all delegations state that they support gender equality in the Conference on Disarmament.

With that in mind, the question arises as to how to take this forward. So I would ask delegations a question. It is a very simple question. Do you agree to request the secretariat to review the rules of procedure to reflect the equality of men and women as expressed by consensus by the Conference on Disarmament this morning and to reflect this in all official languages on the basis of the English text circulated on 28 July?

I see the Ambassador of India. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Sharma (India): I do not have the rules of procedure in front of me, but, as far as I understand, it is the prerogative and authority of States parties or member States to review the rules of procedure, not the secretariat.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India for his intervention. I give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation): Well, the proposal of my German colleague is a new one, so at the moment we cannot make a decision – I mean the Russian delegation cannot make a decision on it because we have to report back to our capital about this new proposal. That is the first point.

The second point is, I fully agree with what was said by the Ambassador of Germany about the situation with gender equality in the Conference on Disarmament. Maybe we can just draw a line under this session by agreeing that there is no gender problem in the Conference on Disarmament, that the Conference is committed to the policy of gender equality and that it is going to continue to enhance gender balance in the forum.

I suppose that is enough. That is the main outcome of our discussion, actually. It will be enough for the record, and my proposal does not need any decision of the Conference. We just draw a line under these discussions. The real outcome, the real result, of our discussion is that there is no gender problem in the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation for his statement. I now turn to the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Ali Abadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would just like, in line with previous speakers, to put on record that actually, on gender equality within this Conference on Disarmament, there is a consensus. There is no gender discrimination within the Conference on Disarmament; all of the members in this room have already expressed their support for gender equality within the Conference. But on a draft decision to change and open the rules of procedure, there is no consensus; on giving the secretariat the mandate to make such a change on behalf of the member States, there is no consensus. It is a prerogative right of the member States to make any change to the rules of procedure, so my delegation is clearly opposed to the latest proposal to give a mandate to the secretariat to amend the rules of procedure.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement, and I now give the floor to the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*via video link*) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Madam President. My delegation supports the view of the representative of India and the representative of Iran that it is the prerogative of member States and not of the secretariat to amend the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament. In addition, the proposal that we have just heard is a new one. We should receive it in writing and have sufficient time to consult with our capitals in order to express an opinion thereon.

I wish to comment on the attempt to impose the text that you have presented, Madam President. Our delegation considers that the text of draft decisions should not be discussed until the underlying idea has matured and all technical aspects have been clarified. During the informal meeting on Tuesday, I presciently concluded that there was no consensus on the draft decision, although there was consensus on the equality of men and women. This is the conclusion that we conveyed to our capital.

The attempt by some member States to impose the text shows a lack of respect for the rules of procedure and the basic rule of consensus. I view the pleas to the President to submit the text as attempts to score political goals. The persistence of some delegations confirms their inability to accept a different point of view or even to attempt to understand the background and give the issue the necessary time to mature. Thank you.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic for his statement, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Germany.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): I am just clarifying what I just said: the last three speakers have erroneously taken the view that I made a proposal. It may have seemed so to them, but that may be a matter of what linguists call “surface structure” and “deep structure” of language. What I actually did was just use reasoning, and nobody can argue with logic. And my conclusion has just been corroborated by the three last interventions.

The President: Does any other speaker wish to take the floor at this time? I see the Ambassador of the United States of America. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor, but I do not believe we can close this session, frankly, without making clear some of the concerns that my delegation has and that I am sure are shared by many other delegations in this room.

All women delegates here today have listened to the various opposing views to this initiative, and I hope they have listened very closely and that they consider them very carefully and draw their own conclusions.

We have listened today to the representatives of a number of countries who have obfuscated, who have brought up issues that have absolutely nothing to do with the issue under discussion. They have tried to bog the discussions down here on the issue of translation instead of focusing on the issue of the principle of equality with regard to gender.

This is one of the most disappointing things that I have witnessed in the Conference on Disarmament during my seven years here in Geneva, though, to be honest, I cannot say that I was surprised. Agreeing to the proposed technical linguistic changes should have been very easy. It should have lasted only as long as it took for the President to describe the proposal and confirm there were no objections.

But here we are, after hours of debate in both informal and formal plenaries and nothing to show for it, except another indicator as to how dysfunctional this body has become. The failure here offers a fitting bookend to the way this year’s session started, with the inability of the Conference to agree on a programme of work. Let me be clear, these twin failures have nothing to do with the efforts of the Conference Presidents, who have worked tirelessly to make this body function at a bare minimum level of effectiveness.

As for those few delegations that are quick to blame the United States, either by name or by innuendo, for the Conference on Disarmament’s current sad state, let me remind them that my delegation was prepared to agree to a programme of work earlier this year, showing flexibility on issues of importance to us. And today we were ready to approve this simple, but symbolically important, update. It should be no surprise that there is a significant overlap between the countries that were the primary obstacles to reaching agreement on a programme of work and those that in essence blocked action today.

There was no hidden agenda here. No slippery slope to slide down or Pandora’s box to open, just a straightforward opportunity for this body to do the right thing. And yet we failed. As many of you well know, I have repeatedly stressed the need for this body to have a serious discussion about how it conducts its business. Today’s unfortunate outcome has only underscored the necessity for such a deliberation, which I very much intend to pursue in upcoming plenaries.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United States of America for his intervention, and I now give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): President, it is a great disappointment that although an overwhelming majority of member States have expressed support for the proposed decision, it has not been possible to reach consensus to update the rules of procedure of the Conference

on Disarmament. The Netherlands wishes to state on record that it is concerned about the inability of the Conference to agree even on technical linguistic updates because a handful of member States have chosen to block consensus.

My delegation would like to thank you, President, and the former Australian presidency for your leadership and tireless efforts to reach consensus. We are convinced that gender equality, diversity and equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of decision-making and action are crucial, including in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, to achieving peace, security and sustainable development.

The Netherlands remains fully committed to addressing women's leadership, gender equality and diversity in disarmament more substantially in future sessions of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement. Before I give the floor to the delegate of the Russian Federation; let me just advise everyone that the interpreters will be leaving us now.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation): I suppose that, once again, the main outcome of our discussions is the confirmation that there is no problem with gender equality in the Conference on Disarmament and we can have consensus on this thesis, definitely. We do not have any problem with gender discrimination, with gender imbalance or with the attempts to follow in the wake of the main trends of the United Nations. And I suppose this fact should please all the women who are in the conference room at the moment.

As to the draft decision in the document before us, here I have to disagree with my American colleague, because we are talking not about a purely political declaration which we can translate into languages rather freely but about the rules of procedure, a legally binding instrument. And here we should be rather careful talking about the translation of this document into all six United Nations languages. This point is very important, and I have mentioned in my previous statements that we see a kind of discriminatory approach in the draft decision, because it was presented to delegations only in one language. We cannot agree with the English version without knowing how it will be translated into Russian, although the linguistic aspect of this issue is not important to us at the moment, definitely. We have had two plenary meetings and we have spent six hours on this, but my delegation did not get a clear answer to the questions which we raised on Tuesday in our statement: What is the usefulness of the initiative? How will its realization help us?

First of all, it was mentioned that it could enhance trust and strengthen the cooperativeness and effectiveness of the Conference on Disarmament. How will the realization of this initiative help us in this respect? It seems to me that our discussions have had a different effect. We have a degradation of the trust between delegations. We have an increase in politicization and we see how some delegations are trying to manipulate the opinion of the Conference, trying to give an unacceptable assessment of the position of certain delegations. For our delegation, this approach and this situation are unacceptable. So, at the moment we do not see any strong argument which we can use in order to support some ideas or some decisions that will let us include the technical amendments in the rules of procedure.

To the contrary, it was our concern before these two meetings – and it is a pity that our concern came true – we were concerned that this new round of consultations and two plenary meetings would just be another negative hit to the work of the Conference on Disarmament and to trust in the Conference, and it is a pity that we have the situation in which we are at the moment.

Once again, then, I would like to repeat my proposal. Let's draw a line under the deliberations on this gender issue with just the simple understanding that there is no gender problem in the Conference on Disarmament and the Conference is fully committed to the policy aimed at enhancing, providing and strengthening gender equality in the Conference on Disarmament and so on and so forth. Those are my ideas.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Russian Federation for his statement. I give the floor to the Ambassador of Peru.

Ms. Alfaro Espinosa (Peru): President, I am really very sorry to take the floor once again, but unfortunately the words in the last intervention of the delegate of Russia were very, very unfortunate. I think I cannot accept this kind of language in this room. It is not a matter of “pleasing” women here. It is not a matter of “pleasing” anybody here. It is a matter of juridical bounding of commitment. And I do not accept his interpretation. What does he interpret? It looks like there is indeed an issue on gender in the Conference on Disarmament, because he says there is no gender issue. I do not accept wording of the kind he used.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Peru for her statement, and I turn the floor over now to the delegate of Mexico.

Ms. Martínez Liévano (Mexico): Continuing in the same vein as the Ambassador of Peru, as this is an official meeting and everything is placed on record, we could definitely not agree to include any reference to say that there is no gender issue in the Conference of Disarmament, in particular because there was no political will to accept a very technical update. I am assuming that “she” will not be happy if I refer to her as “she” for the rest of the meetings.

That is the issue for women. We want to be recognized. If there is really a political will to recognize gender equality – and we are not talking about policies on balance, it is equality that we are looking for – then let’s compromise and work on a text. Madam President, you definitely have our support in the further consultations you may have on this issue.

The President: I thank the delegate of Mexico for her statement. I give the floor now to the delegate of Chile.

Ms. Moraga (Chile): Thank you very much, Madam President, for all your efforts, for Canada’s efforts, for Australia’s efforts and for all the delegations that supported the draft decision. For the record, I also need to state, as my Peruvian colleague and my Mexican colleague have stated, that I respectfully disagree with the Russian delegation’s view that there is no problem with gender in the Conference on Disarmament. May I remind him that actions speak louder than words. When the Chilean author Isabel Allende lost her daughter, she stated: “This bends me, but it does not break me.” This does not break us, Madam President.

The President: I thank the delegate of Chile for her statement. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I see none. So I will adjourn for now, and I will reflect on the next steps. I thank you all for your very active participation.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.