
Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand three hundred and eightieth plenary meeting


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President: Mr. Steffen Kongstad(Norway)

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The President: I call to order the 1380th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

As you are all aware, we will continue this morning with the high-level segment of the Conference. We will hear statements by representatives of Colombia, Canada, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Venezuela, Japan, New Zealand, Italy and Spain.

I will now suspend the meeting in order to welcome our first guest, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to our first distinguished guest today, Her Excellency Ms. María Ángela Holguín, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia. Thank you very much, Excellency, for addressing the Conference. You have the floor.

Ms. Holguín (Colombia) (spoke in Spanish): Thank you, Mr. President, and please allow me to congratulate you on your work as President of the Conference on Disarmament. Colombia reiterates its willingness to work closely with your presidency, as well as with the other five Presidents for this session, all other member States and observers, to overcome the protracted deadlock in the Conference.

It is particularly gratifying for me to address the Conference just as the Convention on Cluster Munitions enters into force for my country.

By way of its steady progress towards the eradication of anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions, unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war in general, Colombia has been reaffirming at the national level its historical commitment to the international system for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. These have not been isolated actions; they are part of the transition that my country, through policy firmly grounded in international disarmament instruments, is engaged in towards achieving a consolidated peace.

With your permission, Mr. President, today I would like to highlight the central role played by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in the building of trust between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) during the peace talks that are taking place in Havana. It was on the issue of comprehensive action against anti-personnel mines that, after three years of complex negotiations with that armed group, a crucial understanding was reached at the negotiating table in Havana. Even before the signature of the agreement putting an end to the conflict, the parties reached an understanding to immediately address the devastating harm caused by anti-personnel mines. For several months, 10 perhaps, the Government, guerrillas and civil society organizations active in humanitarian mine clearance have been working shoulder to shoulder, in a strong gesture of peace, to remove mines from two rural areas of the country.

The representatives of the international community who have visited these pilot projects, many of them, as it happens, diplomats assigned to disarmament affairs — and we are grateful to your country for all the assistance it has been giving us —, bear witness to the projects' success in fully restoring the rights of affected populations. Currently, work is under way in several parts of Colombia with a view to those areas being declared free of mines and to substantially improving the living conditions of the communities affected by this scourge.

As part of that same post-conflict dynamic, attention needs to be turned as well to explosive remnants of war. Colombia has therefore focused on generating the relevant technical capabilities, some of which have gained international recognition.

With regard to instruments for the control of conventional weapons, I am pleased to report that our internal preparations for the ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty, which we hope to ratify in the medium term, are well under way. We have already begun moving forward with the necessary legislative and organizational changes in advance of the Treaty's implementation.

Mr. President, for a country such as mine, which eagerly awaits the arrival of a much-yearned-for peace, the impasse on the issues of nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is troubling. On 17 June 2017, Colombia will have been a member of the Conference for 20 years. During this period, our efforts in the area of the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction, both here in the Conference and in the domestic and regional spheres, have not flagged. Colombia has worked tirelessly with its partners from the region and elsewhere to strengthen national capacity to control radioactive materials, chemicals and biological agents. We have reaffirmed our commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation in all forums where these issues are discussed, such as the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the conferences of States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Treaty of Tlatelolco.

Colombia pursues a comprehensive strategy in this area and has acted to support the universalization of the disarmament and non-proliferation system. In 2015, we ratified the Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. Currently, we are reviewing from a national standpoint the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management and of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.

Notwithstanding the challenges we have faced along the way, the international disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control system, including its supporting framework, still holds good for and is of considerable importance to Colombia.

Here in the Conference, we have persisted in our efforts to get negotiations started again, as our delegation had done in 2002, when, together with the Ambassadors of Algeria, Belgium, Chile and Sweden, it submitted to the Conference on Disarmament the so-named five Ambassadors' initiative. However, it is not easy to maintain confidence in the Conference when it is clear that a lack of flexibility has turned what once had been the merits of its methods of work into permanent obstacles.

We share with other member States the view that the Conference's core mandate is to negotiate disarmament treaties. For that very reason, and bearing in mind that other forums are of a temporary nature and have limited mandates, the Conference cannot continue to shirk the responsibility it bears as the sole negotiating forum in the field of disarmament.

In the paper Colombia submitted, in its national capacity, to the Conference in 2011 containing thoughts on the state of the Conference and how to strengthen it (document CD/1913), one of the first recommendations made was specifically that urgent attention should be devoted to opening up the membership of the Conference to make it more representative of the membership of the United Nations and to providing for real engagement with civil society. Colombia greatly appreciates the efforts made by the Secretary-General of the Conference, Michael Møller, to enable a substantive exchange of views between civil society and the Conference, such as at the informal civil society forum on disarmament that took place on 19 March 2015.

Mr. President, Colombia notes with optimism the proposals made in recent days and appreciates those submitted by the United States, Nigeria, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation on finding a way out of the impasse, which has kept the proceedings of the past 20 years in the Conference from bearing fruit.

We are pleased to see that substantive engagement with civil society is one of the issues addressed in the proposal made by the United Kingdom, which calls for two meetings to be held for civil society representatives to deliver statements and engage in discussion. Colombia supports this approach and recommends that it be made a regular part of the Conference's work.

My country voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 70/33, pursuant to which an open-ended working group was convened to substantively address concrete effective legal measures, legal provisions and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. We are encouraged by the prospects for

ensuring complementarity between this working group and the Conference. The report produced by the working group will be submitted to the Conference, and my country hopes that the working group's contributions will enable the Conference to adopt new positions that will help to advance its work. We call on all States members of the Conference to take an active part in the deliberations of the aforementioned working group.

For our part, Mr. President, we will continue working in both the Conference and the open-ended working group towards the only objective that counts for humankind, one which the United Nations set for itself in the 1970s: the achievement of a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. This will not be possible without the goodwill and flexibility of the countries that possess such weapons. Similarly, no effort to build peace will be entirely successful as long as humankind continues to face the threat of nuclear weapons.

The President: I thank Her Excellency the Foreign Minister of Colombia for her statement to the Conference. I will now suspend the meeting for a few moments.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. I would now like to welcome our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Stéphane Dion, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada. Thank you very much, Excellency, for addressing the Conference. You have the floor.

Mr. Dion (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, as Canada has the good fortune to have two international languages as official languages, I will begin in my mother tongue, French, and will later change into English, so be ready to change channels for the interpretation.

After an absence of five years, it was time for the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada to address the Conference on Disarmament. I am therefore pleased to do so today on behalf of the Government of Canada and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

I will not beat around the bush. This forum has been in a deadlock for nearly 20 years, and that is a very sad state of affairs. Two decades ago, the Conference had a number of achievements to its credit, but it has since lost all its momentum: it cannot point to a single recent contribution it has made to international peace and security.

It is not that the international community is incapable of working together, because it does — just not in this forum. Consider, for example, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions or the Arms Trade Treaty. One of the major recent achievements in the disarmament sphere is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreed between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany. The Plan of Action is an essential contribution to global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, provided that its implementation is completed and verified. Similarly, the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, in which Canada participates actively, deals with a number of important technical aspects of verification that are currently major obstacles to the development of long-term disarmament measures.

At the same time, the efforts made in connection with conventional weapons are extremely important. In particular, the German initiative on light weapons and small arms in the Sahel and the current role of the Arms Trade Treaty in minimizing the destabilizing and often tragic impact of light weapons and small arms in many countries are evidence of very positive trends. I am pleased to announce today that Canada will become a party to the Arms Trade Treaty. Our Government is working diligently to complete the necessary legislative procedures in order to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible.

I wish to stress that all these agreements I have just mentioned were negotiated outside the Conference on Disarmament. The fact that this Conference, which is mandated to conduct negotiations on disarmament, has played no role in these important breakthroughs in disarmament is a harsh condemnation of our inability to move beyond narrow national interests. If the Conference does not resume its substantive work in earnest

and with determination, I am afraid that ad hoc non-proliferation and disarmament efforts in other forums will become the norm.

It would therefore be good to reflect, not only in this chamber but also and above all in our own capitals, on what would happen if the Conference became completely irrelevant. The Conference must emerge from its state of paralysis and it must do so as a matter of necessity, as the world is not that much safer today than it was when the Conference was established in 1979.

The crises in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, to mention but a few, continue to have an adverse effect on regional and international security. The reckless and irresponsible actions of North Korea, which are in violation of its own obligations and United Nations resolutions, cast a shadow over the security situation in North Asia. At the same time, parts of Africa are grappling with situations of instability that are made worse by an oversupply of light weapons and small arms.

(spoke in English)

I will now switch to the other official language of Canada.

Therefore, it is high time for this Conference to get back to work, and I am here to tell you that Canada stands ready to work collaboratively with all of you to get this machinery working again. I am sure that many of you here share the desire to restore the Conference as the world's forum for disarmament negotiations. To achieve this, we must redouble our efforts to find innovative ways of moving forward that respect the real differences between our positions. But for the Conference on Disarmament to contribute to peace in a tangible way, we need to set realistic objectives, taking contemporary strategic realities into account. Preaching total disarmament is not one of these realistic objectives. It is clear that the current environment is hardly conducive to encouraging States that possess nuclear weapons to participate in negotiations on a nuclear weapons ban. Without these countries, an agreement for an immediate outright ban on nuclear weapons may be an appealing gesture, but its practical impact would be highly questionable. Without the participation of the countries possessing nuclear weapons, a ban would not bring us any closer to our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Indeed, premature action risks undermining international stability by creating a false sense of security, without any reliable underpinnings.

Progress toward our collective goal of complete and verifiable disarmament can be achieved if it is incremental, concrete, realistic and verifiable. This is not to say there is nothing we — including non-nuclear weapon States — should be doing. On the contrary, the time is ripe to pursue further political and legal steps within the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Such measures include increased transparency, moratoriums on nuclear tests and the production of fissile material, security assurances, the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and continued work towards the universalization of the NPT.

One objective we must achieve is the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). The Group of Governmental Experts, which Canada was honoured to chair, has already produced a robust, in-depth assessment of future treaty aspects. Their work showed that a treaty is not beyond our reach. Negotiations would undoubtedly be difficult, but the outcome would be a significant achievement. The pursuit of such a treaty would not only help put in place a prohibition against the production of dangerous fissile material, but it would also be instrumental in helping to advance important verification mechanisms necessary for broader disarmament efforts. This is a realistic, achievable step and one that Canada believes must move forward without further delay.

Another example of a concrete objective that we could achieve is the Open-ended Working Group instituted by the United Nations General Assembly last year. Canada is participating actively in the Working Group, not because we believe that the discussions will be easy, but because talking to each other is better than not talking to each other. Canada genuinely hopes that the Working Group will be able to produce a balanced and constructive report on measures for disarmament.

When I look at the Conference on Disarmament, I see a community of diplomats motivated to make contributions to non-proliferation and disarmament. This is why, despite the long-standing impasse in this body, I am convinced that all of us have not given up hope of achieving a more secure world. Steady, incremental progress on disarmament can be made with patience, flexibility, perseverance and courageous leadership. I encourage all of you to rededicate yourselves to finding a way forward. To this end, you will be able to count on Canada.

(spoke in French)

To this end, you may count on Canada.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Dion for his statement to the Conference. I will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. I now welcome our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Alexei Volkov, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Volkov (Kazakhstan): First of all, I would like to congratulate the Ambassador of Norway, Mr. Steffen Kongstad, on his assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I also wish to commend the efforts of the previous President, Mr. Peters Emuze of Nigeria, to seek a compromise on a draft programme of work for the 2016 session of the Conference. In order to adopt an agreed programme of work, it will be necessary to draw on the flexibility expressed by several delegations at the beginning of 2016.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, stated in his annual address to the Conference at the beginning of the year: "I will continue to spare no effort, but the ultimate burden rests on the members of this Conference to bridge the gaps and find an urgent solution to the chronic impasse." We fully endorse these words. The primary responsibility for the ongoing standstill in the Conference and the annual game of déjà vu rests only with the members themselves. No external efforts can solve the problems of stagnation within the Conference if its members will not meet each other halfway. Outside these walls, however, parties are free to criticize the Conference for its inability to begin substantive negotiations.

In the broad agenda of this Conference, four issues have been defined as key: general nuclear disarmament, adopting legally binding, non-discriminatory and universal instruments; the development and signing of a fissile material cut-off treaty; prevention of an arms race in outer space; and negative security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon countries. No one doubts — and this is fully supported — that there is a need to start negotiations on the Conference's four core issues simultaneously and as soon as possible. There are questions about the format and results of the negotiations, but that is the very reason for having a negotiating process: to seek common ground.

Kazakhstan gives priority to the issue of nuclear disarmament as the most crucial and topical challenge faced by our planet. Last year, which marked the anniversary of the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World. Supported by an absolute majority of United Nations Member States, it served as an important step towards the adoption of a legally binding international document for the prohibition of nuclear weapons. We look forward to pursuing its universalization. In this regard, the creation of a global anti-nuclear movement is crucial. Each human being on this planet can and must contribute to the process of nuclear disarmament.

Kazakhstan calls for the speedy development of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT). The conclusion of such a treaty will ensure the irreversibility of the nuclear disarmament process and will also help to minimize the possibility of nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists. Added value under the treaty could come from its inclusion of existing stocks of fissile materials. However, we do not make that a prerequisite for the commencement of negotiations: a major goal for us is to seek mutually

acceptable provisions. In this regard, we supported the creation of — and we sent a representative to — the Group of Governmental Experts doing preparatory work for negotiations on an FMCT. The outcome document of the Group provides a good basis for future substantive talks on an FMCT within the Conference on Disarmament.

Taking into account the rapid development of space technologies, it is especially important to foster further discussions on the issue of the prevention of an arms race in outer space using existing initiatives, including the draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space proposed by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. Although the draft Treaty's provisions may not take into consideration the interests of some parties and there is scope for it potentially to be strengthened, that will be a matter for future negotiations.

As the country possessing the largest launch site in the world — Baikonur — which significantly contributes to the peaceful use of outer space, we support and insist on the adoption of the “No first placement of weapons in outer space” statement. This political statement is a positive step towards confidence-building.

Kazakhstan is the first country in history to have closed its nuclear test site and it voluntarily withdrew the fourth largest nuclear arsenal, as well as created a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia. It is necessary to build nuclear-free zones in other regions of the world, in particular in the Middle East. It is essential to develop an international, legally binding document on negative security assurances for non-nuclear countries by nuclear Powers. Only such guarantees can serve as a basis for trust. It should be outlined that in our region we have attained significant progress with regard to this track. The Protocol to the Semipalatinsk Treaty, signed by representatives of the five nuclear countries, was already ratified by Great Britain, China, Russia and France in 2014, and we hope the United States of America will soon complete its work in this direction.

In addition to these four core items of the agenda, we are also committed to considering at the Conference on Disarmament the issues of cybersecurity, lethal autonomous weapons systems and other matters consistent with modern times and the Conference's mandate.

The nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea not only undermines our efforts but could also trigger a new spiral of nuclear arms races. That is why the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is one of the most essential and significant requirements for nuclear disarmament. The moratorium on nuclear tests, announced on a voluntary basis by some countries possessing nuclear weapons, is a positive step, but it is not an alternative to a legally binding document.

Kazakhstan, as a Co-President of the Article XIV Conference together with Japan, will spare no effort to make the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty effective in accordance with article XIV of the Treaty. In 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution initiated by Kazakhstan in which 29 August — the day that the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site was officially closed — was declared the International Day against Nuclear Tests. I would like to express my concern to the countries that have not yet acceded to or ratified the Treaty: your inactivity is pushing some countries to dangerous action. Looking back over history, Kazakhstan and Japan have a moral right to demand progress on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

In support of our common efforts, the Abolish Testing: Our Mission (ATOM) project was initiated by Kazakhstan. The project's objective is to consolidate global civil society through the signing of a petition for active measures to be taken against the nuclear threat. Currently, more than 200,000 people from over 100 countries have signed the ATOM project's online petition, which requests all Heads of leading States to ratify the Treaty.

We wish to emphasize the significant importance of the process that started with the holding of the conferences on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna. As a country which has experienced the fatal repercussions of nuclear explosions, we fully support the Humanitarian Pledge proposed by Austria.

One of the bricks for the construction of a safe world is the initiative of Kazakhstan regarding the allocation of 1 per cent of each country's defence budget to the Sustainable Development Goals Fund. This endeavour will lend substantial support for the successful implementation of the Goals. In this regard, an issue of great concern is the decision by a number of leading countries to allocate massive funding — trillions of dollars — for the purpose of modernizing their nuclear arsenals.

This year we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the first United Nations General Assembly resolution, which prophetically related to issues concerning the discovery of atomic energy. In addition, 25 years ago the Semipalatinsk test site was closed forever, and 20 years ago the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty became available for signing. I would like to describe these landmarks of our long and not yet completed path in the words of the famous Lebanese philosopher and painter Gibran Khalil Gibran: "March on. Do not tarry. To go forward is to move toward perfection."

In this context, we clearly see our common goal: the whole planet as one nuclear-weapon-free zone and a world free of nuclear weapons. We are ready to go forward tirelessly.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Volkov for his statement to the Conference. This plenary meeting is suspended.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: This plenary meeting is resumed. I would now like to welcome our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Yun Byung-se, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Yun Byung-se (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, as I stand here in this august chamber of the Conference on Disarmament, it feels like a homecoming after a 16-year-long journey. But it is a quite mixed feeling. Why? On the one hand, like the serene landscape of Geneva, time seems to have stopped here, while there has been a sea change in the world, for better or worse. On the other hand, this chamber has not lost its charm and potential to relive the good old days of brisk arms control diplomacy here in Geneva, day and night.

Since Korea is marking its twentieth anniversary as a member of the Conference and the Conference stands at a critical juncture, I have come here with a serious and clear message: we support the efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Michael Møller, to revitalize the Conference and, as one of the six Presidents for the 2016 session, we stand ready to contribute to this end.

Over the past four decades, the Conference has made manifold contributions in the field of disarmament and arms control. In particular, many of us cherish fond memories from the mid-1990s when this body was in full gear and crafted ground-breaking, landmark agreements on weapons of mass destruction, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. For this reason, we all know the Conference can play a catalytic role in furthering disarmament and arms control, thereby improving the international security landscape.

Unfortunately, however, since 1998 the Conference has lost steam. Indeed, at the time I left my posting in Geneva in 2002, it was beyond imagination that, almost 15 years later, the Conference would still have failed to even adopt its programme of work. This abnormal state of affairs — or the new normal of the Conference emanating from its inaction — is incurring considerable costs.

In particular, the paralysis in the Conference is sending out the wrong message about the global non-proliferation regime centred around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Speaking at the Conference on Disarmament in 2011, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned: "The continued deadlock has ominous implications for international security. The longer it persists, the graver the nuclear threat — from existing arsenals, from the proliferation of such weapons and from their possible acquisition by terrorists." Unfortunately, we are seeing his warnings on the nuclear threat materializing

not from the outside, but from within the Conference — because of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a member of this Conference. Indeed, North Korea has a notorious track record that is unmatched:

1. It is the first country to have conducted nuclear tests in this century; and it has conducted four nuclear tests and launched six long-range missiles over the past 10 years, in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions and international norms;
2. It is the first country to have developed nuclear weapons programmes within the NPT regime and announced its withdrawal from both the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the NPT;
3. It is the first country to have officially declared itself a “nuclear-armed State” in its Constitution;
4. It is also the first Conference on Disarmament member State to have declared itself as “the youngest nuclear-weapon State”, at this very Conference last year, and to have threatened the “final destruction” of another Conference member State, the Republic of Korea, here in this august chamber right after its third nuclear test in February 2013.

As can be seen from the above, Pyongyang is like a serial offender. It is no wonder that the Security Council will very soon adopt a landmark resolution with the strongest ever non-military sanction measures in seven decades of United Nations history. This is a clear manifestation of the international community's resolve to punish provocations by North Korea once and for all. It is also no wonder that some member States have raised — at meetings both of the Security Council and of the General Assembly — the issue of the qualifications of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a peace-loving United Nations Member State in view of its persistent provocations and non-compliance.

On top of all this, North Korea has defied and is even now defying United Nations sanctions and international condemnations by declaring that it will continue long-range missile launches. Last week, Pyongyang even stated in public that it will strike the Republic of Korea, as well as the United States, to take revenge in stunning and unimaginable ways.

The key message I wish to deliver is not just about North Korea, but about the implications for the Conference on Disarmament, global non-proliferation and the international community as a whole.

First, for the sake of the integrity and credibility of the NPT regime, we should make urgent efforts to stop and to roll back the nuclear and missile capabilities of North Korea in accordance with existing and new Security Council resolutions. At this very moment, Pyongyang is accelerating its nuclear weapons and missile capabilities: from nuclear bombs and hydrogen bombs to intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. We have heard Pyongyang officially state its intention not only to further develop its nuclear weapons and missiles, but also to use them. As the defence minister of a Conference member State in the southern hemisphere recently remarked, no country in the world is now free from nuclear and missile blackmail by North Korea. Indeed, we are living under Pyongyang's nuclear sword of Damocles, which is dangling right above our heads.

Second, we must strengthen the rule of law in the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime, particularly through ensuring universality and compliance. In this regard, the nuclear tests by North Korea are a direct challenge to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, one of the most significant achievements of the Conference on Disarmament. So, I hope that in June, at the ministerial meeting to be held on the twentieth anniversary of the Treaty's adoption, North Korea will be at the top of the agenda.

Another important means to strengthen the rule of law in disarmament and non-proliferation is to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) without further delay. In this regard, the latest proposal for a flexible mandate is worth favourable consideration. At this very moment, Pyongyang is producing and stockpiling nuclear materials out of the reach of IAEA safeguards. In my view, an FMCT could address such pressing issues as well as other related aspects of fissile materials. Also, it is crucial that the new Security Council resolution on North Korea be implemented without delay, without

exception and without conditions, so that we will be able to achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea.

Third, individual countries should be encouraged to take various and practical steps to work towards our common vision of “global zero”: a world free of nuclear weapons. At the latest Nuclear Security Summit, held in March 2014, my President spelled out our vision of a nuclear-weapon-free Korean Peninsula. Since that time, my Government has been active in regional and global forums to turn the dream of a nuclear-weapon-free world into reality.

Just before I took the floor, we heard from the representative of Kazakhstan. Twenty-five years ago, in 1991, the then newly independent Kazakhstan permanently closed the Semipalatinsk test site, previously a major site for nuclear weapons testing. Now, Kazakhstan is a good model of non-proliferation and a rapidly rising economy in its part of the world. This success story stands in stark contrast to what is happening in North Korea. Indeed, the nuclear weapons and missile programmes of North Korea are the greatest threats to peace and security in my part of the world. If we are unable to stop Pyongyang’s continued pursuit of a nuclear arsenal, it will fuel the vicious cycle of a regional arms race in an already heavily armed region.

Mr. President, we are currently living in turbulent times and are witnessing the eruption of multiple geopolitical tensions and global challenges. In other words, we face an oversupply of problems and a deficit of solutions. Amid these challenges, the Conference on Disarmament has an important role to play in promoting international security by fulfilling its mandate on disarmament and arms control. If the impasse in the Conference goes on, it will incur a high cost extending beyond the field of disarmament, especially when the three pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, development, and human rights — should reinforce each other now more than ever. Even though your mandate is to disarm, let me ask you to arm yourselves with a spirit of flexibility and compromise to revitalize this Conference. I truly hope that this Conference will summon the wisdom and initiative to break the deadlock and open new ground.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Yun for his statement to the Conference. This meeting is suspended.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. I would now like to welcome our distinguished guest, Her Excellency Ms. Delcy Rodríguez Gómez, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Rodríguez Gómez (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to begin by extending warm greetings to you, Mr. President, and to all those present.

Mr. President, it has been shown that the arms trade is a boundless source of wealth with a huge global impact. More than US\$ 2 trillion is said to be invested in the licit arms trade, not to mention the unknown, and indeed unknowable, figures involved in illicit arms trafficking.

There is a contradiction, however, between the international community’s stated position on the importance of protecting life, on the one hand, and the production of and trade in arms of varying degrees of destructiveness, on the other, inasmuch as the latter undermine that stated position and influence the behaviour of international stock markets. That relationship makes this one of the most perverse aspects of capitalism. Simply put, such a posture negates one of the basic premises of the United Nations — the protection of human rights — even if it is true that maintaining international security means tolerating the existence of weapons of mass destruction.

Given the deadlock of nearly two decades in the Conference on Disarmament, we need to rethink the euphemistic language that is associated with a unipolar vision of domination and is perilously anodyne in the context of nuclear discourse. We should perhaps begin by reassessing the situation and calling things by their name from the outset: the terrible suffering inflicted on the civilian population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 70

years ago and the indelible, painful scar left on humanity by that nuclear attack — that was a brutal and unconscionable war crime unlike any other in history.

The Conference is a well-suited and indispensable multilateral forum whose universality is attested by momentous achievements throughout its history, such as the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This Conference is an essential part of the multilateral system, and it must resume its mission without further hesitation and adopt, as a matter of urgency, a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that takes into account all disarmament-related priorities.

Venezuela has backed all initiatives aimed at achieving total nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, as it is of the view that such weapons and their proliferation are a negation of humans as individuals and of life on this planet. The international legal rules that support banning this threat to international peace and security are flouted by the hypocritical behaviour of States given over to arms build-ups and warmongering, in other words, those countries that boast of having the strongest military in the world, which they use to twist the arms of countries that do not want to do what they need them to do.

Today, more than 50 years after the birth of the anti-nuclear movement, there are still serious doubts about whether or not to move towards the definitive eradication of this form of violence, which poses a real threat to humankind. It is indeed strange that not a single major decision has been made in this 66-member multilateral forum, for want of consensus, since the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

For that reason — and my country shares this resolve — the move to create a worldwide exclusion zone or zone free of nuclear weapons must be given strong support, for similar reasons and with the same determination as for anti-smoking campaigns. One particular statistic is thought-provoking: it is estimated that annual expenditure on basic social services for the entire world comes to approximately US\$ 40 billion, for a total of US\$ 400 billion over 10 years — that is less than half the amount allocated to the aberrant world of the arms business.

While the nuclear-weapon States continue to pour vast resources into military nuclear research, we and the other peace-loving peoples of the world are still waiting for universal, full nuclear disarmament, as that is the sole absolute guarantee of international peace and security.

Obviously, the way to develop coherent disarmament policies is to strengthen multilateral mechanisms as forums where all States Members of the United Nations can come together voluntarily and with a commitment to honour the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and, in general, the international rule of law, as was recently proposed in the Security Council. The idea is to confront a phenomenon that — like terrorism, violent extremism and intolerance — entails serious risks and does enormous damage to all the inhabitants of this planet, inasmuch as evidence has shown that the annihilative power of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction poses a threat to life as we know it and to our continued existence.

The rapid development and modernization of nuclear weapons is reflected in the fast-growing capacity of nuclear technology to destroy all traces of life and, indeed, our entire planet. A further concern is the possibility of nuclear weapons being acquired by terrorist groups. Responsibility for preventing the diversion of such weapons rests with the States that possess them. The risk of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorist groups is a very serious one. We are not against the peaceful use of nuclear energy in support of development, but the use of such technologies should be subjected to the tightest security possible.

We stand by our previous call for the exploration and use of outer space to be pursued exclusively for peaceful purposes and for the benefit of all countries, regardless of their degree of economic or scientific development, and without compromising the security of any State. In our view, one of the international community's key priorities is to conclude

an international treaty to prevent an arms race and prohibit the placement or use of weapons in outer space.

The Latin American and Caribbean region is a zone of peace and has been recognized as such by a number of regional integration organizations, including the Union of South American Nations, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America — Peoples' Trade Treaty. Inherent in that status is a commitment not to allow or provide scope for any build-up of nuclear or other similar weapons of devastation.

We also stress the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries' long-standing position on the need for swift commencement of negotiations on a convention for the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the sole guarantee against the use or threat of use of such weapons. That position was expressed both at the Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Tehran in 2012, and at the sixty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2013.

The countries of the South stand as models in this regard. Nuclear-weapon-free zones are an effective means of affirming the idea of a global ban, addressing non-proliferation issues and promoting a common regional policy of non-nuclear security.

Venezuela is also a party to the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established the most densely populated nuclear-weapon-free zone in the world. This is a commendable contribution, made by the countries of the region, to the political ideal of peace and international law in the sphere of disarmament.

Venezuela condemns all acts of international terrorism in all its forms, in particular in its capacity as a sitting member of the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. This condemnation includes the nefarious use of weapons, regardless of their classification as nuclear (type A), bacteriological (type B) or chemical (type C). Accordingly, the new brand of international terrorism that seeks to prioritize weapons-related violence at the expense of human rights is to be decried in the strongest terms possible. But that international terrorism, which often operates from behind the cover of loosely structured existing or contrived groups, is nothing more than the embodiment of new kinds of aggression and covert interventionism intended to undermine the sovereignty of States.

In some instances, international criticism has led to the condemnation of terrorist States and has pointed to how the violence that spawns chaos spreads and thus ensures the success of interventionist, oppressive designs. The current situation in Syria is a prime and telling example of just how perverse terrorism can be when fomented by States given over to warmongering and arms build-ups in their effort to quash the legitimate will of the people and seize their wealth. The case of the Palestinian State, which day in and day out endures guerrilla-like, terrorist actions with clear genocidal intent, must also be mentioned. Venezuela therefore endorses the initiatives of the United Nations to work towards a world without violence, a just world that encourages the peaceful resolution of disputes, the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation in accordance with the rules of international law, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, non-interference in the domestic affairs of States and the prohibition of the threat or use of military force.

Venezuela, through its diplomacy of peace based on Bolivarian ideals, advocates constructing a multipolar international system that is built around peace, justice, development and full respect for the rules and principles of international law.

The challenge for the Conference, Mr. President, delegates and representatives, is to arrive at a legally binding treaty on nuclear disarmament. The thought that we might fail to do so brings to mind the words of Albert Einstein, the recipient of the 1921 Nobel prize for physics who was demonized and unfairly marginalized for his advocacy of the international value of peace. In response to a question about what weapon would be used in a third world war, he said: I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones, as there will be absolutely nothing left on the face of the Earth.

Peace is the supreme aspiration of all peoples. Venezuela embraces that aspiration in the Bolivarian spirit.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Ms. Rodríguez Gómez for her statement to the Conference. I will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. It is now my pleasure to welcome our distinguished guest, Mr. Masakazu Hamachi, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Hamachi (Japan): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Kongstad, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation throughout your tenure. I also would like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Møller, and his team for their continuous support of the work of the Conference.

It is well known that Japan, as the only country to have ever suffered atomic bombings, has made nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation one of the central pillars of its foreign policy. Japan has put forth its best efforts in taking a leading role towards the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons, including through revitalizing this important forum.

Japan commends the Presidents' tireless efforts towards the adoption of a programme of work during this year's session. Considering that the mandate given to the Conference is not the discussion but the negotiation of a disarmament treaty, the work of the Conference should lead to the early commencement of negotiations on a disarmament treaty. This year, the Open-ended Working Group in Geneva has promoted our discussions in the Conference. It is a wake-up call from the international community that the Conference should end its two-decade stalemate and fulfil its mandate by adopting a meaningful programme of work. Japan will spare no effort in this regard.

Looking back on the recent situation of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, active discussions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and effective measures for nuclear disarmament were held at the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference and at the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. However, the Review Conference was not able to adopt a final document. The General Assembly resolutions relating to the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and to establishing the Open-ended Working Group were adopted, but with dissenting votes from a group of countries. Japan is concerned that, as a result of those discussions, the rift between the nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States seems to have widened.

Japan has consistently stated that to promote nuclear disarmament, practical and concrete measures with cooperation between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States are necessary. Japan ascribes importance to the following measures, among others, as practical and concrete measures:

- Enhanced transparency of nuclear forces
- Deeper reduction of all types of nuclear weapons by all States that possess nuclear weapons and eventual multilateralization of nuclear weapons reduction negotiations
- Early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
- Early commencement and conclusion of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT)
- Promotion of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification.

With regard to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, Japan — together with Kazakhstan — served as Co-President of the Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Treaty last September. In addition, Japan hosted a Group of Eminent Persons meeting in Hiroshima last August. Japan will continue to call strongly for early ratification of the Treaty by all annex 2 States and to work to facilitate the Treaty's early entry into force.

Among the four core issues of the Conference on Disarmament, the early commencement of negotiations on an FMCT is vital as one of the important building blocks towards the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons. Any issue, including existing stocks, should be dealt with within the process of negotiations. These concrete and practical measures are included in the General Assembly resolution entitled “United action with renewed determination towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons”, which was presented by Japan and was adopted with the support of a large majority of 166 United Nations Member States.

It is our view that nuclear disarmament must be promoted based on two understandings: a clear understanding of the humanitarian impact of the use of nuclear weapons and an objective assessment of the reality of the security situation.

Japan, more than any other country, fully and directly understands the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. In this regard, Japan has long been working very hard to spread awareness across national borders and generations of the reality of the devastation that occurred in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to deepen understanding. Awareness of the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons fundamentally underpins all nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

With regard to security, despite repeated calls by the international community the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea conducted a fourth nuclear test in January 2016 and launched a ballistic missile in February 2016. This series of provocations in a short range of time seriously undermines the peace and security of North-East Asia and of the international community. They are serious violations of relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, of the Japan-Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Pyongyang Declaration and of the September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks. Furthermore, they represent a serious challenge to the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime based on the NPT. Thus, Japan lodges a serious protest against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and strongly condemns its nuclear test and missile launch. Japan reiterates its strong demand for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to immediately and fully implement relevant Security Council resolutions and other commitments. Such a severe security environment must always be taken into consideration in promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

As a foundation for promoting the above-mentioned concrete and practical nuclear disarmament measures based on the two understandings, it is imperative to maintain and strengthen the NPT regime. Despite the outcome of the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of the international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. In order to strengthen the NPT regime, it is vital to achieve a meaningful outcome at the 2020 NPT Review Conference. Seizing every opportunity, Japan will make the utmost efforts to that end through the 2020 NPT review process starting from next year. Japan will, as a member of the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, continue to strengthen cooperation with other States and groups of States.

This year Japan holds the presidency of the Group of Seven and it will host the Group’s Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Hiroshima in April and the summit meeting in Ise-Shima in May. Japan is serving as Co-Coordinator for facilitating the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty until next year. Making the best use of these opportunities, Japan will work to make progress towards the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, the widening difference of views negatively affects international discourse on nuclear disarmament. The Conference on Disarmament is no exception. The longer the stalemate in the Conference continues, the more its *raison d’être* will be questioned. Japan urges the Conference to achieve a meaningful decision on a programme of work that will lead to the early commencement of negotiations.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Hamachi for his statement to the Conference. The meeting is suspended.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. It is now my pleasure to invite our colleague Ambassador Dell Higgie of New Zealand to come to the podium. Ambassador Higgie, you have the floor.

Ms. Higgie (New Zealand): Having worked so closely with you, Ambassador Kongstad, for a considerable time now, it is a great pleasure for me to take the floor today under your presidency. My Minister for Foreign Affairs sends his greetings to you and to the Conference on Disarmament and hopes that the significant success that Norway has had in so many multilateral endeavours over the years will rub off on the Conference on Disarmament — and that you will be able to unblock the work of the Conference and put in place a programme of work.

Sadly, however, the auguries are not exactly in your favour. The excellent efforts of Nigeria and the proposal they put forward during their presidency did not yield fruit. Nor indeed have the 117 other presidencies that have taken place over the period since the Conference on Disarmament was last able to work according to its mandate. So the statistics would suggest that the scales are certainly tilted against Norway.

But the statistics are disappointing also in a broader context. In the nearly 40 years of its existence, the Conference has managed to conclude negotiations on only two treaties: the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, with the latter having been finalized only via the intervention of the United Nations General Assembly. United Nations Member States could be forgiven for thinking that one treaty text for every 20 years is a rather poor return on their investment. If the international community does attach importance to multilateral disarmament outcomes, it would seem that the Conference on Disarmament is not, indeed, a very propitious place in which to do it.

The repeated entreaties from a range of Ministers and other dignitaries, including the United Nations Secretary-General, over the years — and reflected again in statements during this high-level segment — that the Conference begin negotiations on the important topics on its agenda have not served to break the ongoing deadlock. Efforts from many delegations have come to nought. Having just thanked Nigeria for its attempt last month to move forward, I should also thank the United Kingdom for the proposal it has recently put forward. We certainly commend the United Kingdom for its innovative approach — a laudable attempt to try something quite different. Of concern to us, however, is the fact that despite the Herculean efforts it would call for — 50 days of discussions — it would not seem likely to bring us any closer to a programme of work which enables the Conference on Disarmament to live up to its mandate. It seems highly doubtful, then, that we would get a return on such a considerable investment. And we do already have so many opportunities for discussion within the existing disarmament machinery.

New Zealand welcomes all efforts aimed at advancing a programme of work for the Conference. But a programme of work should never be an end in itself. Nor, equally, is there real advantage to a programme of work intended to facilitate just any negotiation process at all — regardless of what that may be. While, superficially, the optics of a Conference on Disarmament engaged in any negotiation whatsoever may be appealing, a lowest common denominator approach to the selection of a topic for negotiation does not, I think, respond well to the very real security concerns and humanitarian interests of all our citizens.

While endorsing the concern expressed yesterday by Russia regarding the Conference's "protracted standstill", and acknowledging their genuine creativity in putting forward a "fresh approach" and suggestion for an entirely new issue for negotiation, I do have to say that I have never heard any of my fellow countrymen or -women bemoan the lack of a prohibition on the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. Instead, New Zealanders have long drawn comfort from the very comprehensive prohibitions and provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and would wish, rather, to see negotiations focused on the only weapons of mass destruction not yet prohibited: nuclear weapons.

The views of New Zealand on nuclear disarmament and our aspiration for a world without nuclear weapons are often stated and very well known. I am not going to belabour them here again, including because we had a very full opportunity to do so during last

week's meetings of the Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. This was a forum mandated by the United Nations General Assembly — with all the legitimacy and inclusiveness that entails. It excluded no one and welcomed everyone, which is something truly appropriate for a meeting dealing with a global issue and risks that affect the security and well-being of us all. We look forward to our continued engagement on this issue at the next set of meetings of the Open-ended Working Group in May and to its outcome later this year.

Our discussions here in the Conference on Disarmament are counterpointed also by another very different meeting held in Geneva in recent days. At the start of this week, the States parties to the Arms Trade Treaty met to work through the issues surrounding, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Treaty's secretariat, thereby bringing to maturity this final aspect of the Treaty.

I was lucky enough to be present at what I might call the birth of the Arms Trade Treaty negotiation: the first meeting of its Open-ended Working Group in 2009. The entry into force of the Treaty less than five years later is one, if not the best, illustration of what the international community can do when a genuine spirit of multilateralism is able to prevail. The fact that the Treaty was never routed at any stage through the Conference on Disarmament is a rather telling point — one, in my delegation's view, which serves to reinforce the view that the Conference's rules of procedure continue to load the dice against genuine multilateralism.

I could not do better than echo the call made yesterday by the Foreign Minister of Finland for a review and update of the working methods of the Conference. She called, too, for an expansion of its membership so that it can become a more inclusive and representative body, and one that takes better account of the beneficial contribution that civil society and academia can make to our work.

Above all, Mr. President, it is time for the Conference on Disarmament, in a genuine spirit of multilateralism, to adopt a programme of work enabling a negotiation process on issues of core relevance to us all.

The President: I thank Ambassador Higginson for her most encouraging statement. I will now suspend the meeting for a short moment.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. I would now like to welcome our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Benedetto Della Vedova, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Della Vedova (Italy): Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to address, this year again, the Conference on Disarmament, which still represents the most important multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. I wish to reiterate the commitment of Italy to the work of this Conference and congratulate the Norwegian presidency, whose mandate started last week. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Michael Møller, and to his team for their invaluable support to the work of the Conference.

Major multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements have been negotiated within this Conference, and they still represent impressive accomplishments of the negotiating forum at Geneva, which contributes to making the world safer. Today, given the deadlock of almost two decades, and in the face of the increasing tendency to take disarmament negotiations outside the Conference, we fear that its relevance may be in danger. In our view, the Conference on Disarmament remains a cornerstone of the multilateral disarmament machinery: preserving its primary role in promoting substantive negotiations on disarmament and non-proliferation and overcoming its current stalemate, therefore, continue to be paramount. Last year the Conference did not agree on a negotiating mandate. Even though its activities were intense and, in our view, very useful, the adoption of a programme of work and the start of substantive work on key issues during the current session remain a major concern requiring flexibility from all sides.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and an important element in the further development of nuclear energy applications for peaceful purposes. We wish to reaffirm our commitment to creating the conditions for a safer world for all without nuclear weapons, in accordance with article VI of the NPT. Any further progress should be based on considering the three pillars of the NPT as mutually reinforcing. In this respect, we reaffirm our full support for the implementation of the 2010 action plan, which includes concrete steps on nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

While regretting that consensus could not be reached at the ninth Review Conference of the NPT, we look forward to actively participating in the new Preparatory Committee cycle, which will start next year and bring us to the 2020 Review Conference. Productive work in the Conference on Disarmament throughout this year would create momentum also for the NPT. We should all be ambitious and take advantage of this period to advance in the implementation of the 2010 action plan and bridge different positions for further progress towards the achievement of the Treaty's objectives.

In this context, we continue to support the convening of a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction — to be attended by all States of the region on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by them — as decided by the 2010 Review Conference.

We share others' deep concern about the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Indeed, it is the awareness of the continuing nuclear risks to humanity and a desire for a peaceful world for future generations that underpin our efforts for effective progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to participate constructively in all relevant discussions on nuclear disarmament with a clear focus on practical and effective measures. We should avoid creating shortcuts that do not contribute to achieving the mutually reinforcing goals of disarmament and non-proliferation. A progressive approach to nuclear disarmament represents a realistic way of reaching "global zero". With this mindset, we are participating in the work of the Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, established by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 70/33.

Despite its being criticized for failure to deliver concrete results, the disarmament community achieved two landmark successes in 2015: on the one hand, the agreement on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action by France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, the Russian Federation and the United States (E3 plus 3), the European Union and Iran, and the recent implementation day; and on the other, the successful conclusion of the first Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty.

Last year also witnessed a fruitful continuation of the promising debate within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons on the issue of emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems, which contributed significantly towards greater understanding of the multiple aspects that these involve. We look forward to continuing and deepening these discussions in the coming months, with a view as well to the Review Conference of the Convention.

Italy remains indeed deeply committed to the full implementation of international instruments on conventional weapons, including by providing technical, material and financial assistance to States in need, such as those affected by mines, cluster munitions and any kind of unexploded remnants of war. Our efforts also aim at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions by all stakeholders involved in this domain. With this in mind, Italy — as one of the major donors — has assumed for 2016 the chair of the Mine Action Support Group, whose first meeting was held last month in Geneva.

We regret that, in addition to some successes, we have to note some disturbing developments. We condemn in the strongest of terms the nuclear test in January and the long-range missile launch on 7 February by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These actions constitute a serious violation of several United Nations Security Council

resolutions, the obligations of North Korea under the NPT and the de facto international norm of a moratorium on nuclear tests, as well as further provocations and threats to international peace and security. We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to abandon all its existing nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner and to refrain from any further provocative actions. Furthermore, we urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to the NPT and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards at an early date as well as to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

A complete ban on nuclear tests would be a crucial step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons and, as such, a way to strengthen security for all. In this regard, Italy commends the States having recently ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, one of the main accomplishments of this august Conference. Italy calls upon all States that have not yet done so — and, in particular, the remaining eight annex 2 States — to sign and ratify the Treaty. Pending the entry into force of the Treaty, we urge all States to maintain all existing voluntary moratoriums on nuclear weapons, test explosions or any other nuclear explosions and to refrain from acts that defeat the objective and purpose of the Treaty.

The immediate start of negotiations, within the Conference on Disarmament and without preconditions, on a treaty dealing with fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices remains a priority. At the same time, let me reiterate that we are ready to engage in productive work on all the Conference's agenda items. In this regard, we continue to support any constructive initiative aimed at finding a possible way forward for the Conference to resume its work. Also, we warmly welcome the efforts to actively involve civil society in the discussions of this assembly and we attach the utmost importance to their concrete and constructive contribution to the activities of the Conference.

Mr. President, Italy will spare no effort in supporting the work of this assembly. Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are essential components of our foreign policy. As a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2017-2018 term, Italy will further promote the disarmament agenda at the United Nations, as we have consistently been doing in all multilateral forums, including this Conference, the Group of Seven and the European Union.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Della Vedova for his statement. I will now suspend the meeting.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. I would now like to welcome our distinguished guest, His Excellency Mr. Ignacio Ybáñez Rubio, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Spain. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Ybáñez Rubio (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, delegates, it is a pleasure for me to participate once again in the Conference on Disarmament, which is the body mandated to develop disarmament measures that will move us closer to achieving the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. Spain wishes to express its strong support for this forum, which has negotiated treaties of vital importance, and its deep regret at the deadlock that has taken hold in recent years.

The international community is faced with serious challenges that it must confront if it is to ensure the peaceful coexistence of nations; we thus need to appeal to the sense of responsibility of all States and engage in dialogue to that end. Spain views the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as the cornerstone of the international framework for disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Notwithstanding the need for a balanced approach to all three of these pillars, we maintain that there is a special need to make progress in the field of disarmament, as set forth in article VI of the Treaty, by requiring nuclear-possessor States, particularly those with large arsenals, to substantially reduce those arsenals. We therefore call on the major Powers — the United States and the Russian Federation — to relaunch negotiations aimed at reducing their strategic arsenals in line with the threshold established in the New START Treaty.

Spain regrets that the 2015 NPT Review Conference was unable to adopt a final consensus document. We must nevertheless seek to further strengthen the Treaty by making good on the commitments assumed at previous review conferences, in particular the 2010 action plan. In this regard, Spain expresses again its frustration at the failure to convene a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and we ask that efforts be redoubled in order to hold that conference as soon as possible.

Spain has participated with great interest in the discussion around the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that a nuclear-weapon attack would have. We believe, however, that this debate should also take into consideration the security dimension. We all want to see tangible results in the disarmament sphere; in our view, the prohibition of nuclear weapons will not, in itself, lead to their elimination.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament is the sole body mandated to negotiate multilateral disarmament treaties. It is therefore necessary to foster a climate of negotiation and realistically identify the areas that are riper and more likely to yield a consensus. Our priority should be to negotiate a treaty on fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices that includes both disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. For this, we will need to show creativity and flexibility in our negotiations, and we believe that there are new proposals on the table that merit consideration. The Conference must also work towards reaching a consensus on a programme of work and continue the substantive discussions on other important items of its agenda, such as nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances and outer space. It must also continue to reflect upon how to improve its working methods while respecting the principle of consensus, and it should give serious thought to expanding its membership, within reason, and allowing more active participation by civil society.

Spain wishes to congratulate Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany for the agreement reached in July 2015. Spain believes that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), which endorsed the Plan of Action, establish clear limits for the development of the Iranian nuclear programme under the strict verification system of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Spain will take all steps necessary to ensure the effective implementation of resolution 2231 (2015) in its capacity as facilitator on the Security Council.

The nuclear test by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 6 January and the launch of a ballistic missile on 7 February represent serious violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions and a threat to international peace and security. Spain reissues its call for the North Korean authorities to comply with Security Council resolutions and to honour the commitments they have assumed by dismantling their nuclear arsenal in an irreversible and verifiable manner and putting an end to these tests. This situation points up the urgency of a swift entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was adopted 20 years ago this year. We call on all States that have not yet done so, especially those listed in annex 2 of the Treaty, to ratify or reaffirm it as soon as possible.

Mr. President, another serious cause for concern is chemical weapons. Spain calls on the Syrian Arab Republic to fulfil its obligations under Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015). We have been requesting this since the start of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was established pursuant to Council resolution 2235 (2015) with a view to identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and we are hopeful that all the chemical weapons present in the country will soon be completely eliminated.

Similarly, Spain expresses its concern about the situation in Libya and the risk that chemical weapons currently stockpiled there pending their destruction could fall into the hands of terrorists. We support the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to bring about the destruction of this arsenal in a swift, effective and safe manner. At the end of this year, the eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention will take place. It is our hope that countries will continue to advance in the implementation of this Convention and that the necessary cooperation and confidence-building measures will be strengthened. Against such a backdrop, the risk of

weapons of mass destruction, be they nuclear, chemical or bacteriological, falling into the hands of terrorists is very real and serious.

Spain, as Chair of the Committee responsible for monitoring compliance with Security Council resolution 1540 (2004), will seek to advance the comprehensive review process under this resolution, which should be concluded before December 2016. As part of the review, the Committee will assess the degree to which the resolution has been implemented and, if necessary, the mandate of the Committee will be adjusted to reflect any new threats or circumstances.

In the conventional weapons sphere, Spain welcomes the steps taken in relation to the Arms Trade Treaty; the first conference of the States parties to the Treaty took place last year in Mexico and endowed the Treaty with the administrative measures and support necessary to move forward with implementation. We wish to highlight the importance of the effort under way to counter trafficking in firearms, especially small arms and light weapons, as they constitute the primary means of combat in present-day conflicts. Spain reaffirms its support for Security Council resolutions 2117 (2013) and 2220 (2015) and for the 2001 United Nations Programme of Action. We are confident that the sixth biennial meeting on the Programme of Action, which will be held in June 2016 in New York, will serve to strengthen its development and full implementation.

Allow me to conclude, Mr. President, by reaffirming the unwavering support of Spain for the work and aims of the Conference on Disarmament. It is a forum in which all member States should do their utmost to seek out areas of consensus and constructive solutions for the benefit of all.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Ybáñez Rubio for his statement to the Conference. This meeting is suspended.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The plenary meeting is resumed. I understand that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has requested the floor. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. So Se-pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Mr. President, since this is my first time taking the floor under your presidency, let me congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our full support and cooperation.

I have requested the floor to exercise the right of reply in order to respond to the prejudiced accusations and distorted arguments made by some delegations today. My delegation has made clear its principled position on many occasions, including in our statement to the Conference plenary, that our first successful hydrogen-bomb test was a just measure of self-defence to defend the sovereignty of the country and the right of a nation to existence and to ensure peace on the Korean Peninsula and regional security. I will not take the time to reiterate in detail the principled stand and peace-loving efforts of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea again today.

I have listened carefully to those statements with their biased views and allegations, and have become doubtful whether they are really intended to be of help for global peace and security, including on the Korean Peninsula, or whether they deliberately disregard reality to take sides out of political motivation. We have explicitly explained on several occasions that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has been exposed to a nuclear threat by the United States for more than half a century: it is by no means potential or abstract, but a practical and physical matter. We have sufficient data to prove and substantiate this both scientifically and systematically; they can be shared with whoever is interested.

In parallel, we have called for the States concerned to pay due attention to the root cause, rather than to phenomena, and to speak and behave responsibly if they are really concerned about peace and security in the Korean Peninsula and the world. Those countries that are keen to repeatedly voice stereotyped condemnations against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have never cared for our position, nor have they called to account the huge military exercises jointly carried out every year by the United States and

South Korea with the involvement of strategic nuclear strike means. This clearly demonstrates that even though they are calling for the destabilization of the situation and regional and global peace and security, their words and deeds are totally inconsistent and contradictory.

I want to ask some questions of those countries. How would you react if you were faced with a continued nuclear threat and decades-long sanctions? Would you like to allow your sovereignty to be infringed upon? Are you willing to give in and sacrifice your national security interests? If that is the case, the Conference on Disarmament should have already overcome its long-standing stalemate, I think. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a nation that experienced the bitterness of having been colonized by Japanese imperialism for almost 40 years and therefore values national sovereignty more than anything else.

As regards the satellite launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, we have already clarified that it was the exercise of an independent and legitimate right that fully conforms to universally agreed international laws on the peaceful use of space, including the Space Treaty. It is not the first time that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has successfully launched an Earth observation satellite into orbit for economic and scientific development. Even though the satellite has been proven to be functioning well in space, some countries are deliberately denying that self-evident reality and are trying to link it with military purposes. Those countries never called into question the recent launch of intercontinental ballistic missiles by a certain country, revealing nakedly their double standards and the real objective they are pursuing. Maybe that is attributable to their comfortable and satisfied feeling under the nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile umbrella provided by that State.

It is truly disappointing and deplorable that the South Korean delegation has taken the Conference on Disarmament as a platform for criticizing just measures by its fellow countrymen and fostering confrontation. We have already made clear that nuclear deterrence by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not directed at harming fellow countrymen but at protecting peace on the Korean Peninsula and security in the region from the vicious nuclear war scenario of the United States. The South side should refrain from any provocative acts against fellow countrymen, blindly availing themselves of the hostile United States policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. President, as I mentioned last time, more sanctions will bring about a tougher reaction. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will not overlook any moves to turn the Conference on Disarmament into a politicized forum seeking to take advantage of the segregation of the Korean Peninsula, and it will never tolerate any attempt to infringe upon the sovereignty of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ambassador So, for his statement. I recognize the representative of the United States. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Buck (United States of America): Mr. President, as this is the first time my delegation is taking the floor under your presidency, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership and assure you of our full support for your efforts.

Mr. President, I had not intended to take the floor today, but as the United States has been mentioned by the representative of North Korea, I feel it important just to reiterate a few of the points we have made previously in this chamber.

The latest test and missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in clear violation of its United Nations obligations, has been universally and unequivocally condemned by nations around the globe. Pyongyang must realize that its pursuit of nuclear weapons is fundamentally at odds with its national interests. North Korea will only achieve the security and development it claims to seek by living up to its international obligations and commitments. The United States is fully committed to the security of our allies in the region, and we will take all necessary steps to defend ourselves and our allies and respond to North Korean provocations.

The international community stands united in its firm opposition to the development and possession of nuclear weapons by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. We do not, and will not, accept North Korea as a nuclear-armed State.

The President: I thank the representative of the United States for his statement. The next speaker on my list is the representative of Korea. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Seo Eun-ji (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, my delegation completely rejects the arguments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. First of all, let me point out that unlawful acts cannot create rights. In this regard, it is very evident why the Democratic People's Republic of Korea cannot justify its nuclear programme as a right of self-defence. The clear-cut points were already mentioned in my Foreign Minister's speech, so my delegation does not intend to refute the groundless arguments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea point by point.

Regarding the joint Republic of Korea-United States exercises, these exercises have been conducted annually for several decades to respond to the clear and existing military threat from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. They are purely defensive in nature. These exercises have been conducted in a transparent manner, with advance notification to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and under the observation of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission.

With regard to the right of peaceful use of outer space, everyone here in this room knows that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not entitled to exercise such an independent and legitimate right, because the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the only country under sanctions against conducting any launch using ballistic missile technology. All rights are reserved only for the countries that faithfully implement their obligations under the system agreed by the international community. However, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea repeatedly blames others for its illicit activities and provocations, while claiming legitimate rights for a sovereign State. Indeed, the irresponsible behaviour of North Korea is in no way consistent with the common goals and cause of the Conference on Disarmament, which aims to promote nuclear disarmament and halt nuclear proliferation.

We continue to urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to be a responsible member of the Conference on Disarmament. This Conference is a forum for disarmament, not for development of nuclear weapons. Accordingly, the repeated breach of international obligations by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea calls into question its very qualification as a member of the Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of the Republic of Korea for her statement. I see the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. You have the floor, Ambassador.

Mr. So Se-pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Mr. President, concerning the statement by the delegation of the United States, I have to remind everyone why we have to develop a nuclear programme: it is due to the United States, actually. They have compelled us to do this. They have to understand this. They know it, but they do not want to understand that. In a few days' time, they will again start the Key Resolve/Foal Eagle joint military exercise in South Korea against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. With this military exercise, if we stand still and do nothing, what will happen? Who knows what will happen.

Regarding the South Korean delegation's remarks, let me briefly respond. Actually, the nuclear issue originated due to the introduction of nuclear weapons to South Korea by the United States; and serious nuclear threat has been pushed by the ever-increasing joint military exercises that I mentioned, with strategic nuclear attack means. As is well known, South Korea is not in a position to take any counteractions to this, because they have to follow and have to accept the instructions of the United States. Instead of undertaking harmonized and peace-loving measures together with its same nation, they are opening Pandora's boxes here and there. The simple explanation is that the exercise of the right to command wartime operations is now in the hands of the United States. We would be more than happy to settle internal issues on our own as a nation. You would be well-advised to

refrain from requesting others to join action against fellow countrymen and inciting distrust and confrontation.

The President: I thank the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his statement. The representative of the Republic of Korea has asked for the floor. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Seo Eun-ji (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, I am sorry to take the floor again. I already mentioned that I fully reject the arguments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Republic of Korea is an independent, sovereign State. We have a close alliance with the United States. The international community will not accept provocative action by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Also, I urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from making harsh and inappropriate comments towards a member country of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea must heed the significant meaning of the strongest set of sanctions in more than seven decades currently being prepared by the Security Council. That demonstrates the resolute willingness of the international community that it will not sit back and overlook the contempt and disregard of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for international norms and rules anymore.

It is high time for the international community to show zero tolerance for the unbridled provocation by North Korea so that it cannot dare to go ahead with additional provocations. At the same time, you should make it pay the full price for a series of challenges to the authority of the United Nations and the Security Council.

The President: I thank the representative of the Republic of Korea for her statement. I do not see any other delegation wishing to take the floor.

This concludes our business for this morning. Our next formal plenary meeting will take place on Tuesday, 8 March, at 10 a.m. in this chamber. This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.