
Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and fortieth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 30 June 2020, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Mr. Robert Müller (Austria)



The President: I call to order the 1540th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour for Austria to preside over the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me once again to thank all of you for coming or connecting to this plenary meeting today after the long suspension of meetings. I hope you and your loved ones are safe and healthy.

I would also like to thank Ambassador Sally Mansfield and the six Presidents of this year's session for their consultative, collaborative and, most importantly, tenacious spirit in this unprecedented period. Before we proceed with our order of business for the day, I would like you to join me in observing a minute of silence in tribute to the lives lost and impacted in the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis and in recognition of all the front-line workers who continue to tirelessly fight the crisis, which is currently at different stages around the globe. Please rise.

The President: Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to the new colleagues who have assumed their responsibilities as representatives of their Governments to the Conference on Disarmament during the suspension of meetings: His Excellency Mr. Lim Sang-beom, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the Conference, His Excellency Mr. Federico Villegas, Permanent Representative of Argentina, and His Excellency Mr. Sabri Bachtobji, Permanent Representative of Tunisia. On behalf of my own Government and on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to take this opportunity to assure all of you of our full cooperation and support in your new assignments.

I would like to propose that the order of business of our meeting this morning be as follows. First, I will deliver a statement as President of the Conference, which will be followed by the statement delivered by Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Conference. This will be followed by a statement by my predecessor, the Ambassador of Australia, Ms. Sally Mansfield. After that, there will be statements by delegations that wish to take the floor. As you have seen, there is a very large number of delegations that have asked to be included in the speakers' list prior to today's meeting. This is also a reflection of my intensive consultations – I received overwhelming feedback on the importance of resuming the work of the Conference. In order to give all the delegations the opportunity to speak, I encourage all delegations today to be particularly mindful of time constraints. Should a delegation feel the need to respond to a statement, kindly indicate your intention to the secretariat, as I intend to take these responses at the end of the day.

It is also my intention to allow a speaker to end his or her statement before taking points of order, if there are any. Allow me now to deliver a statement on the occasion of this first plenary meeting under the Austrian presidency.

Disarmament is a key component in advancing international peace and security. Yet global military expenditures are rising. We might be on the brink of an arms race. It is time to be reminded of the importance that disarmament plays not only in limiting risks of escalation but also in easing tensions and building trust. Disarmament has traditionally been a key pillar of Austria's foreign policy.

In the light of the very particular circumstances we are faced with today and the limited time available, I will try to draw some attention to or inspiration from the approach of my compatriot Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* and try to be as concise and short as possible. I will limit my statement to 10 observations on the state of affairs of the Conference.

First, in addition to the ongoing climate crisis, we are currently facing a global health crisis that is turning into a socioeconomic crisis in many countries, with potential implications for national and international security. It is my firm conviction that the Conference is called upon to rise to the challenge and make a positive contribution.

Second, I suggest a careful and cautious restart, focusing more on what unites us and not on what disunites us, with an obligation to add to effective multilateralism, a multilateralism that yields results.

Third, 2020 is the year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the Charter and the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has been 32 years since the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Rereading the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly, the first special session devoted to disarmament, I was struck by the ambitious and cooperative language used in this agreed text: "All the peoples of the world have a vital interest in the success of disarmament negotiations. Consequently, all States have the duty to contribute to efforts in the field of disarmament." And:

The accumulation of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, today constitutes much more a threat than a protection for the future of mankind. The time has therefore come to put an end to this situation, to abandon the use of force in international relations and to seek security in disarmament, that is to say, through a gradual but effective process beginning with a reduction in the present level of armaments. The ending of the arms race and the achievement of real disarmament are tasks of primary importance and urgency.

These words are still valid today.

Fourth, the importance of listening to each other and trying harder to identify possible agreements towards, and ultimately on, a programme of work and an eventual start of negotiations. We have to try to look beyond rhetorical posturing and see where there are opportunities to get out of the current cul-de-sac the Conference finds itself in.

Fifth, being fully aware that the Conference was designed to be a negotiating body, I would hereby like to appeal to members to rethink the consensus principle and remember what it was initially intended to be – namely, a tool to be used as a last resort when it is otherwise impossible to prevent ultimate security interests from being affected, not an automatic trump card with which to block by procedural means any potential proposal to advance the cause of multilateral disarmament.

Sixth, we should also draw inspiration from one of the last major concrete achievements of the Conference, the 1996 founding of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, born of the ambition to end nuclear testing for good. It has established a unique and comprehensive verification regime with a global international monitoring system at its heart. Entry into force of the Treaty would be the next important step.

Seventh, the 112-day break forced upon us as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic could be used as a reflection phase and maybe also as a stimulus to try a new approach.

Eighth, history shows us that ostensibly insufficient levels of trust and confidence should not stand in the way of negotiations. Sometimes we have to start negotiations on a thin level of trust and allow trust and confidence to grow as by-products of multilateral negotiations, while focusing on substance.

Ninth, the importance of additional confidence- and trust-building measures. Vienna recently hosted talks between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on disarmament, arms control and the future of the New START. It is positive that the discussions are going to continue. We hope for progress in these important deliberations and positive security implications for the international community.

And tenth, the importance of cross-regional cooperation. The cooperation by the group of the six Presidents of the annual session has been excellent. Austria, as a participant in the group endeavour, has tried to do everything to structure our work on the basis of a programme of work. We came very close. The vast majority of countries have shown flexibility and pragmatism. Pragmatism, flexibility, political will and a commitment to advance on the path of disarmament are what the world expects of us. It is up to us to deliver. Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to give the floor to Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Secretary-General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Conference.

Ms. Valovaya (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament): Thank you. Mr. President, distinguished delegates, I warmly welcome our delegates – those participating in person or remotely – back to a formal meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. It is a true pleasure to address this august body again, making use of this innovative hybrid format that is allowing us all to meet today.

Our ability to offer hybrid meetings was made possible following a repurposing of resources to enable an expansion of the hardware in this very room and the acquisition of specialized conference software and related support services. We are all still adjusting to this new way of working and are learning together.

I thank you very much for your continued patience and indulgence, especially in the light of the technical challenges we experienced prior to this plenary meeting of 30 June. The unprecedented global health crisis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has placed an immeasurable strain on our medical, economic and social systems and resources.

In Geneva, as elsewhere, the normally vibrant calendar of governmental meetings is the concrete expression of multilateralism. COVID-19 has had a considerable and visible impact here. This Conference was not able to meet as scheduled under the Presidency of Australia, and other disarmament meetings have also been postponed.

I would like to thank Ambassador Mansfield of Australia for her efforts and initiatives, and for sustaining in these difficult conditions the collaborative spirit that has defined the six presidencies of the 2020 session.

Despite these challenges, the interest of disarmament stakeholders in continuing crucial dialogue did not falter. The fact that we are meeting today is a true testament to your collective determination to continue these vital discussions on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control issues. It also demonstrates your collective commitment to preserving the disarmament architecture.

Please rest assured that my team and I stand ready to do our best to continue supporting the important work of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you the very best in our discussions.

The President: I thank Ms. Valovaya for her statement and for her presence here today at our meeting. Before I give the floor to Ms. Mansfield, the Ambassador of Australia, I wish to express once again my appreciation to both her and her team. She will give us her assessment of the expectations that member States have of the Conference on Disarmament, as collected during the Australian presidency. I thank her for the outstanding cooperation.

Ms. Mansfield (Australia): Thank you very much, Mr. President, and thank you, Secretary-General Valovaya, for your kind words. I am still pretending that Vanessa Wood is in fact sitting just behind me, so if I do not look back I can believe that. It has indeed been a team effort.

I want to thank you and the secretariat and the Office for Disarmament Affairs as well for all the efforts that were undertaken to make this meeting possible. It really is a pleasure to see all of you here today and to know that others are joining us virtually and that the work of the Conference on Disarmament can be taken forward.

Our presidency was very much part of the continuing approach taken by the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, the last President of the 2019 session and the first President of the 2021 session. Working with our committed, clever colleagues from that group has really been a highlight in what for us was a very unusual presidency. I also wish to extend my welcome to our new permanent representatives here today, in particular to Ambassador Villegas of Argentina as one of the group of the year's six Presidents.

Delegates to the Conference told us over the time that we ran our consultations that they welcome strengthened coordination this year. The objective is continuity, better governance and transparency, so that members can get the most out of significant investments in this body, an objective that met with universal support.

During our presidency, we invited delegations to share views on the priorities and the role of the Conference, perhaps on how to break the deadlock and how to be more effective. We thank colleagues for taking this exercise seriously, and I am pleased to share your perspectives – the perspectives that we heard over that period of time – with you here today.

We spoke with more than 40 Conference members and observers. I will mention some of the highlights today and post a longer version online. It is worth noting that many thought the Conference should consider the implications of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic for our work: from practical logistics – how technology can better support our work – to broader questions of trust, risk reduction and indeed the role of experts.

Delegations told us that the packages proposed by the group of the year's six Presidents were the right approach in the circumstances, a good attempt to balance diverging views. For many, they were a missed opportunity. Some preferred structured discussion on agenda items this year but were ready to join the consensus. Others wanted subsidiary bodies. Some said that a programme of work should match the Conference's mandate as a body created to negotiate legally binding instruments. The inclusion of a process on improved and effective functioning was seen as valuable, though some were concerned it could be a distraction.

Overall, we saw no consensus on whether the Conference's programme of work should include a negotiation mandate. A plain reading of the rules of procedure does not require this, though some feel strongly that a programme of work should reflect the Conference's negotiation purpose. But I wonder if this difference is really so fundamental that we will allow it to block any substantive progress on the issues themselves. Can we ever, I wonder, move from the lobby to the dining room?

Mr. President, as the Conference has not negotiated for years, it is not necessarily at the front of the minds of busy policymakers in capitals. We thus asked delegations to tell us what were the most important security and arms control issues that they think Conference negotiations could help manage. We heard some really thoughtful perspectives, and those included that the Conference agenda could do with a shake-up to better reflect contemporary threats. That said, the four core items capture fundamental international security challenges, especially that of nuclear disarmament. Many were concerned about worsening geopolitical tensions and thought progress on nuclear disarmament was inadequate. In this context, any good-faith engagement was welcome.

Implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was important for States parties. Some thought a Conference on Disarmament discussion before the NPT Review Conference would be useful. Several initiatives, including the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, the Eminent Persons Group and Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament could usefully be further discussed in the Conference on Disarmament.

Many think that negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty is a logical step, with preparatory work already done. But there is frustration over the chances of starting negotiations due to differences over scope and objective. The view was expressed that it is a treaty whose time has passed. Some feel strongly that negotiations should be on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein; others were less fixed on the Shannon mandate and saw it as sufficiently flexible not to impinge on any delegation's core security concerns.

There was interest in nuclear risk reduction, including through examining the work of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, and an expectation that the NPT Review Conference might provide guidance. Reducing threats and risks in outer space is becoming more urgent. There was a desire to find ways to address security issues to, from and in space to deal with constantly evolving threats.

Negative security assurances were raised but not in a lot of detail. And while important for some, particularly in the context of the Middle East, there were few specifics on how to take that work forward. Many were sceptical about the prospects for negotiations on any issues in the foreseeable future. Trust was low. And work seems required to build it. However, Mr. President, I think your comment about not letting a perceived need for complete trust get in the way of progress is a very valid one and one that we should reflect further on.

Conference on Disarmament members were clear on what they want the Conference to negotiate, but the priorities were different. The point was made that the most important issues are those which have an impact on strategic stability. The challenge for most delegations was how to build consensus on negotiations. And all Conference members share this responsibility. Some thought that, even though negotiation of legally binding instruments seems out of reach for now, importantly, it is clear that the groundwork matters. Agreeing to establish bodies to advance preparatory work would be a positive step, as the 2018 precedent showed us.

The Conference could concentrate on softer instruments like codes of conduct or action plans, as provided for by rule 23 of its rules of procedure. We could work from the ground up rather than from the top down, focusing on subsidiary aspects of issues, possibly paving the way to more ambition. This could include nuclear risk reduction, nuclear disarmament verification and transparency regarding military activities in space. This would expand the range of options for making concrete progress with benefits for international security.

For fissile material negotiations, we need to overcome absolutist positions. Responsibility for this lies outside the Conference and rather more in national capitals. There is a need for flexibility, including on existing fissile material stocks. Interpretation of the Shannon mandate should be as broad as possible. But if that mandate is not delivering anymore, it may be that we should ask whether it is time for a new mandate.

On the prevention of an arms race in outer space, people saw merit in taking smaller steps. Success on the smaller elements might build momentum for more ambitious undertakings down the track. Ideas shared included a ban or guidelines on debris-creating tests of anti-satellite weapons, norms of responsible behaviour, consideration of dual-use and counter-space technologies, and exchanges of information.

Mr. President, many recognize that the deadlock is not a result of the rules of procedure. Political commitment both within and beyond the Conference is required.

The Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament says that the Conference has the authority to negotiate, not that it must. Extensive work is needed before negotiations are ready. One interpretation is that a programme of work is a workplan agreed at the start of the year outlining what the Conference will do during its session, a guide to facilitate our work and to give direction. There is no requirement that it set out the start or continuation of negotiations on any item, although of course it could if that were agreed. Opportunities to create ad hoc working groups or agreements to launch negotiations are meant to occur organically through our discussions. One suggestion was to limit the time spent trying for a programme of work. If, for example, the first President of the year was not able to land a programme of work, then we could move immediately to substantive discussions and continue other work behind the scenes.

There was also a sense that the countries with the largest militaries and nuclear arsenals had to show leadership. Others can advocate, but without leadership from the five permanent members of the Security Council, we cannot break the deadlock. Some raised the value of making the Conference a more effective platform for diverse views – civil society certainly adds value to our work.

Conference members were interested in how we could be more effective. Some thought we needed a better environment for meaningful discussions without jeopardizing the Conference's main tenets. Discussions should be depoliticized and might be more productive if held informally. Working papers with ideas would also be useful. Some thought we should review the Conference's membership, including its enlargement, as the rules of procedure ask us to do that periodically.

Many cited cooperation by the members of the group composed of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, the last President of 2019 and the first of 2021 as a good example of how we can work more effectively. We have discretion to implement incremental adjustments. Some argued for self-discipline in the application of the consensus rule, another point that you eloquently outlined, Mr. President. Breaking consensus should be understood as a final

resort to avert decisions truly detrimental to national interests, not as a tool to stifle general discussion.

We could lengthen presidencies to six weeks to allow each President a more meaningful amount of time to guide the Conference. Conference on Disarmament documents could note the year they were produced rather than just sequential order. Another more radical suggestion was that if the Conference continues to underperform, then perhaps it should be shuttered but not abolished until such time as States decide there is a treaty negotiation that they are prepared to negotiate in the Conference.

I want to emphasize that these are your reflections. These are what we heard from all of you. We hope that colleagues will find this summary useful and that they spur other conversations and energy to use this body in a more effective way.

Mr. President, we thank colleagues for their support for our proposal to make the Conference's rules of procedure gender-neutral. We think this remains a modest and a sensible proposal whose time has come. We were disappointed not to be able to take it further during our presidency and very much hope that this issue will be taken up by others; it would be a simple but important gesture that the Conference on Disarmament can do something that objectively has no downside.

We look forward to working with you to agree on these changes.

Mr. President, a final word: I mentioned Vanessa Wood a little earlier as an individual who had helped build a great deal of trust, and I think it is a testament to the power of an individual in a setting such as the Conference on Disarmament. Ultimately, the Conference must be more than just the sum of its parts. We must be like an orchestra with many voices but that when played can actually create something of value that is more important than the individual parts. We must listen, we must find how we can bring our voices together to move these interests forward, to make progress on these issues that remain incredibly important. For all your support on these issues and to you, Mr. President, for taking them following on from us, our sincere thanks.

The President: I thank Ambassador Mansfield for her statement and for her kind words. I also thank her very much for the very concrete and valuable reflections she has brought to the table.

I would now like to open the floor to delegations that wish to speak. The first speaker on my list is Ambassador Youssef of Egypt, who will speak on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. Youssef (Egypt): Thank you, Mr. President. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of 21. Let me start by congratulating you on your assumption of the Conference on Disarmament presidency and expressing our appreciation to the outgoing President, Ambassador Sally Mansfield of Australia.

The Group of 21 commends you for the consultations that you held during the past weeks and for the transparent and professional manner in which you conducted your work. The Group stands ready to render its full support and cooperation for the successful discharge of your mandate.

Mr. President, our States and societies are facing their greatest challenge since the Second World War, as our health, economic and social systems are under unprecedented strain in the fight against the global health situation. The pandemic arrived as the Conference was facing its own challenges, The Group reaffirms and recommits to the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation and expresses determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in these areas.

Cognizant of the unprecedented challenges the Conference is facing, the Group has shown flexibility to temporarily adjust to the current situation, while reiterating that priority should always be given to the health, safety and well-being of all delegates and United Nations staff.

The Group believes that the resumption of the work of the Conference under such circumstances and with those temporary arrangements should not set a precedent and that the work of the Conference should be conducted in a manner that fully respects the rules of

procedure and the negotiating mandate of the Conference. The Group reiterates the urgency for the Conference to execute its mandate in line with the spirit of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and to adopt and implement a balanced and a comprehensive programme of work on the basis of its agenda.

Finally, the Group would like to stress, once again, that the Conference on Disarmament is the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum mandated by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and emphasizes the importance of preserving it by strengthening the nature, role and mandate of this body. The Group underscores the urgency of redoubling our efforts in order to reinforce and revitalize the Conference and preserve its credibility by resuming substantive work.

The President: I thank you, Ambassador Youssef, for your statement and for your kind words. I will now give the floor to the representative of Croatia, Ms. Kemppainen, who will speak on behalf of the European Union. She will be followed by Ambassador Villegas of Argentina.

Ms. Kemppainen (Croatia): Mr. President, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, the stabilization and association process country and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

I would like to congratulate Austria on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and pledge our full support for the resumption of Conference meetings in an inclusive, transparent and safe manner, in full respect of the rules of procedure and the principles of multilateralism and multilingualism.

It is high time to come together and take stock of developments which may affect our work. We commend the outgoing presidency, that of Australia, for continuing with informal consultations, building bridges and seeking convergence. We fully support the proposed technical change that would make the Conference's rules of procedures gender-neutral.

The European Union will continue to support the efforts of the six countries holding the presidency of the Conference in 2020. The group composed of the year's six Presidents, the last President of 2019 and the first of 2021 has demonstrated exemplary cooperation and coordination to improve consistency and continuity this year and beyond. We regret that no consensus has yet been reached on its proposal for a programme of work that would enable the Conference to continue meaningful technical discussions and pave the way for the long-overdue start of substantive negotiations on new disarmament instruments.

Mr. President, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is testing the multilateral system like never before. We are encouraged that the 194 member States of the World Health Organization were able to set aside their differences and adopt by consensus a resolution put forward by the European Union on a collective response to the global health crisis. We also welcome the presidential statement adopted by the Human Rights Council.

The global health crisis is shaking our societies. It could deepen existing conflicts, generate new geopolitical tensions, hamper the achievement of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change, bearing in mind that drought, scarcity and pressure on limited resources are already an increasing cause of conflict. The crisis could also lead to further serious human rights violations and exacerbate disinformation campaigns and other malicious cyberactivities.

No country can tackle such challenges unilaterally in a highly interdependent, globalized world. International cooperation is required, whether we are talking about COVID-19, climate change, irregular migration or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We need effective multilateralism, with a strong and reformed United Nations equipped with the tools to address current and future challenges in a coordinated way, bearing in mind the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

The European Union was one of the earliest and strongest supporters of the call by the United Nations Secretary-General for a global ceasefire, and we call on all actors to abide by it.

Our response to the crisis is one based on solidarity and cooperation. This is why, on 8 April 2020, the European Union launched the European Union team package of €15.6 billion to assist third countries in their attempts to prepare for and respond to COVID-19. Several European Union initiatives, such as the European Union Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence, are also actively responding to the pandemic.

The European Union calls on all States to uphold the integrity of the rules-based international system, with effective multilateralism as a key principle and the United Nations at its core. They are indispensable for maintaining international peace and security.

We are deeply concerned over the continued erosion of the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture and heightened tensions, which also affect the Conference on Disarmament. The current pandemic should not be used as an excuse to bring disarmament to a standstill or reverse past achievements.

This is a critical time. The European Union attaches the utmost importance to the extension of the New START, to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and to the implementation of all commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The European Union believes that a new arms race would not serve anyone's interests, especially at a time when we must join forces to address the common challenges humanity is facing.

We should continue with the universalization and implementation of the conventional arms conventions, such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and reaffirm support for the humanitarian goal of the Convention on Cluster Munitions in the light of the forthcoming review conference. We need to continue our deliberations on issues such as lethal autonomous weapons systems, outer space and cyberactivities and counter the threats posed by the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons. The implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention has to continue, in particular as the pandemic has demonstrated the need for cooperation and capacity-building in the area of biosecurity and biosafety and the need for solid confidence-building measures. Despite COVID-19, the developments in these fields continue, and hence multilateralism in this field needs to continue with a view to making the world more secure.

For this reason, Mr. President, it is important for disarmament meetings to be fully preserved and to take place with respect for multilingualism and inclusivity, relevant rules of procedure and good expert participation. We hope important meetings that have been postponed will be rescheduled in the future.

The President: I thank the representative of Croatia for her statement and for the kind words for the President. I will now give the floor to Ambassador Villegas of Argentina, to be followed by Ambassador Lim Sang-beom of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Villegas (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. It is an honour for me to address the Conference on Disarmament for the first time as Permanent Representative of the Argentine Republic. Let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency of this Conference and on the Austrian delegation's efforts to allow the disarmament community to meet again for the first time after the pandemic. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian delegation for the efforts it made during its presidency to bring the Conference back to substantive work, and to highlight the continued cooperation among the six Presidents of the 2020 session, which is a highly positive development for the Conference that has allowed us to work together in a constructive manner.

The world has lately experienced some radical changes in the area of international peace and security. Often these changes are surprising and cannot be quickly absorbed, which generates a certain sense of instability and uncertainty; a feeling compounded by the emergence of other global threats that are seemingly unrelated to disarmament, such as the current pandemic. In this context, the capacity of contemporary international politics to confront and resolve these constant challenges is being pushed to the limit. Yet we are aware that peace is imperative; for Argentina, it has been State policy since its return to democracy. We have always sought to work constructively and proactively in the sphere of disarmament.

For that reason, we have encouraged the close coordination among the six Presidents of this session, given the difficulties that each presidency encounters in achieving concrete outcomes in just four weeks. Argentina will also have the privilege to preside over two important events: the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Sixth Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. Regarding the Arms Trade Treaty, Argentina encourages those States that are not yet parties to join this instrument and we welcome the new members who are bringing us closer to achieving our goal of 150 States parties.

As to the question of how to make the Conference more efficient and effective in its work, we believe that it is essential to adopt a sustainable approach so that each year we find ourselves in a better situation than the last and so that the Conference can gradually emerge from its current state of virtual paralysis. To achieve this, we believe that we should engage in a debate with a two-track approach: on one the one hand, internal reflection within the Conference to identify tools and proposals that will allow it to resume substantive dialogue; and on the other, discussion of the Conference's public diplomacy strategy with a view to incorporating new voices and technical inputs that will be conducive to a climate of trust among members and to the world's trust in the Conference.

For the internal debate, we propose a two-pronged strategy. Firstly, it is fundamental that we should address the issue of the presidency of the Conference. In recent years, the Conference has been unable to resolve certain issues by applying the rules of procedure, creating uncertainty about how to proceed and causing discomfort among the States. Secondly, the fact that each member of the Conference holds the presidency for a four-week period reduces the likelihood of achieving practical results, especially when it is difficult to optimize coordination between the six Presidents of the session. This underscores the need for a debate on this issue. Argentina believes that improving the functioning of the presidency will allow the Conference to establish a continuous substantive dialogue and thus reclaim its negotiating mandate. As long as the Conference adopts its decisions by consensus, it is not practical for negotiations on binding instruments to be subjected to temporary constraints or conditions that hamper any substantive or technical progress.

Furthermore, we must consider how this Conference can regain the prestige it enjoyed as a centre for analysis and debate of the main global issues and instruments in the sphere of disarmament and arms control. We must consolidate the path that brings new topics and voices into debates, by involving independent experts from civil society who can add quality and clarity when it comes to finding common ground – as the delegation of Australia mentioned – and by addressing topics such as cybersecurity and lethal autonomous weapons systems, which cut across the core issues of disarmament. We could also carry out a comparative analysis of the different legal instruments that the Conference has adopted, such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Biological Weapons Convention, which would help us to identify common elements and methodologies that may be conducive to the development of new instruments.

In conclusion, the continuity of substantive and technical discussions, on the basis that dialogue is a priority for building trust and finding consensus, will enable us to move forward towards more realistic and gradually more ambitious mandates. We continue to work for peace, committed to the lofty goals of this Conference, convinced that multilateralism and international cooperation are the only way to achieve a better world.

The President: I thank Ambassador Villegas for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency. I now give the floor to Ambassador Lim Sang-beom, to be followed by Ambassador Hashmi of Pakistan.

Mr. Lim Sang-beom (Republic of Korea): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. Let me also commend your able leadership and the efforts of the secretariat, which have led us to the resumption of the Conference session today. I would like to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

As the new head of the delegation of the Republic of Korea to this august body, I look forward to cooperating wholeheartedly with other colleagues to move the agenda of the Conference forward.

Mr. President, in recent years we have witnessed indications of weakening international disarmament regimes and a deteriorating international security situation. Now we have another cause for concern: the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the collective response to it. Some even argue that the coronavirus is a decisive test of the overall United Nations system, and multilateralism is now facing a challenge. In this respect, I hope that the resumption of the Conference today will start to revive the momentum for dialogue. I know I should not be overly ambitious, but I look forward to fresh impetus for genuine and sincere discussions among States on both long-standing and newly emerging agenda items, which will contribute to revitalizing the Conference.

At this juncture, resources for disarmament-related issues and platforms are becoming increasingly scarce. However, as the President noted, there is a call for us and the disarmament community to make even more effective and efficient use of the Conference. In my view, one way of doing that is to generate constructive and positive impetus for dialogue and cooperation in preparation for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. In doing so, I believe that there is a real need to adjust to the new realities presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than adhering to the old ways of thinking and working. For instance, we need to actively embrace the new and evolving approach of virtual discussions on key disarmament agenda items. Ultimately, in this shifting international security landscape, the continuation of the habit of dialogue is much more important than the format. I hope that we all share this sense of urgency.

Let me briefly touch upon the current situation on the Korean Peninsula. The recent developments on the Korean Peninsula are certainly regrettable, but we are not discouraged. My Government will make every effort to overcome the difficulties. We continue to pursue complete denuclearization and the establishment of lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. We firmly believe that genuine lasting peace and stability can be realized only through peaceful means such as dialogue and diplomacy. In this regard, I would like to express our sincere appreciation of the international community's strong support. We will certainly continue to count on you.

As I begin my time in Geneva, I would like to take this opportunity to say to all in the disarmament community that it will be my pleasure and honour to work with all of you in the months and years ahead. I deeply appreciate the warm welcome extended to me by ambassadors and colleagues from the disarmament community. I am very much open to listening to your opinions and guidance and I look forward to cooperating with you all.

The President: I thank Ambassador Lim Sang-beom for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency. I would now like to give the floor to Ambassador Hashmi of Pakistan, to be followed by Ambassador Li Song of China.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): Thank you very much, Mr. President. I congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. We appreciate your wide-ranging consultations prior to this meeting. We also thank the secretariat for its efforts. Let me also join other colleagues in extending a warm welcome to the new Ambassadors from the Republic of Korea, Argentina and Tunisia.

Mr. President, you have invited this body to utilize the break caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic for reflection, and to explore a new approach. My statement will touch on these aspects. But let me share with you how we see the developments at the global and regional levels. We meet at a time of foreboding and turbulence globally and regionally. The global order founded 75 years ago on the principles of the United Nations Charter is on the brink of breakdown. The international security environment is frail. Even as old disputes fester, new conflicts have emerged among and between States. Multilateralism is undersold. The United Nations is often ostracized on purpose. International law, norms and rule of law are all deliberately undermined. Unilateral and unlawful actions that contravene Security Council resolutions are pursued with impunity. Foreign occupation continues to be legitimized.

There has been visible regression in the arms control approaches, agenda and mechanisms. The global consensus on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation has further eroded. Instead of fulfilling nuclear disarmament obligations, none of the nuclear-weapon States is willing to forswear these weapons for the foreseeable future. The original bargain

of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, for all intents and purposes, seems discarded. Not only is the arms control regime in retreat, but there is also a resurgence of the global arms race, in both the conventional and the non-conventional realms.

Nuclear dangers are on the rise. The prospects of the use of nuclear weapons and resumption of nuclear testing are growing. The power and asymmetries between established major Powers and smaller States are accentuating. Powerful States are pursuing absolute security and domination through weaponization, integration and operationalization of space technologies and cybertechnologies.

These dangerous developments are accompanied by continued policies of granting exceptions and waivers in complete disregard of long-held principles of the rules-based international nuclear order. Discrimination and double standards persist even as complaints over the erosion of the rules-based international order grow louder. Commitments to multilateralism ring hollow when long-standing non-proliferation rules are subordinated to strategic, political and commercial considerations. As a result, the global peace and security landscape presents a grim picture, with its attendant negative fallout on various regions.

Many of the negative developments that I have outlined are evident in South Asia, where the largest State continues to pursue a strategy of coercion, hegemony and domination over its neighbours. This region, which is home to one fifth of humanity, is being prevented from realizing its full socioeconomic potential by the hubris of the regime infused with religious supremacy. Proposals for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve disputes are rejected by its ruling clique.

The aspirations of South Asian people for sustainable development are being held back by its zero-sum policy of “my way or the highway”. The denigration of multilateralism is on full display. This country has continued its assault on international law and United Nations Charter principles. Some of the most obvious examples of wilful defiance of international law are visible in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

On 5 August last year, the self-professed largest democracy once again violated international law and 12 Security Council resolutions. Contrary to the provisions of Security Council resolutions, India resorted to unilateral and unlawful actions to change the demographic composition of the occupied territory. India’s deliberate defiance of international law continues through the illegal awarding of domicile and residency to non-Kashmiris, so as to convert Kashmiris into a minority in their own homeland through publication of new political maps laying claims not only to Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir but also to Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Under the garb of COVID-19 restrictions, the people of Kashmir have been subjected to a double lockdown enforced by hundreds of thousands of members of the Indian security forces. India has dismissed the United Nations Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire. Instead, it has intensified its violations of the ceasefire along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir and the working boundary.

Since 1 January 2020, India has committed 1,440 ceasefire violations, deliberately targeting innocent civilians on the Pakistan side of the Line of Control, killing 13 and injuring 104. India has cut the fencing in five places and deployed anti-tank spikes and BrahMos cruise missiles along the Line of Control. Media reports emerging from occupied Jammu and Kashmir reveal that India is using Carl Gustaf M3 shoulder-fired rockets manufactured by Saab to target and demolish civilian homes. We urge the countries concerned to investigate these reports on the use of these weapons in the light of their respective Arms Trade Treaty obligations.

To divert world attention from its oppression in occupied Kashmir, India has in the past resorted to false flag operations. Given its past record, India may stage such an operation again or initiate another military adventure against Pakistan to avoid international scrutiny of its abuses of international law. There are growing signals of such aggressive Indian intent towards Pakistan. We desire peace and development in the region. We do not want a war or conflict with India; however, as Pakistan demonstrated last February, if attacked, Pakistan has the will and the capacity to defend itself and will respond resolutely to any act of aggression.

Ultimately, the aggressive Indian behaviour and posture have been enabled by a lack of international accountability. In fact, the absence of accountability, accompanied by a generous supply of advanced conventional and non-conventional weapons and technologies, has imbued the Indian ruling class with a sense of imperial hubris. The signals from India are unmistakable. India's External Affairs Minister has publicly bragged that India will one day take physical control of Pakistan-administered Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. The Indian Army Chief has claimed the right to launch a pre-emptive attack against so-called Pakistan terrorist camps.

On 16 August 2019, the Indian Defence Minister made a thinly disguised threat of a pre-emptive nuclear strike against Pakistan, discarding even the fig leaf of its dubious "no first use" policy. India's military doctrine is no longer a secret – it envisages fighting a limited war with Pakistan under the nuclear overhang. India has built the capacity for a so-called cold start surprise attack on the Pakistan-India border.

These belligerent statements and offensive doctrines cannot be dismissed as mere bluster and bravado. They need to be seen in the light of the increasingly militarized mindset that grips India today. Left unchecked, such doctrinal shifts, steady build-ups of arms and advanced war fighting platforms carry grave implications for peace and security in South Asia and beyond.

The fundamental question before this Conference is how and whether it is possible to reverse these troubling developments within the larger global security context. Even as this Conference has the mandate to negotiate treaties, it has not been able to do so for several decades. On some of its oldest agenda items, which have far-reaching significance for international security, there has not yet been any progress. Since its inception, the Conference has been able to deliver on its mandate and produce landmark treaties, with its existing rules of procedure or methods of work. But let us not forget this progress was possible only when the interests of major Powers so dictated or when they asserted where and when they assessed that agreeing to treaties would be compatible with their respective national security interests.

The ongoing impasse in this chamber is shaped by developments, approaches and policies pursued by Conference members. Put simply, this body does not and cannot remain immune to the external geopolitical environment. It is this rather gloomy but realistic context that the Conference is confronted with and is obliged to operate in.

In a world beset by challenges to multilateralism and the rule of law, we have no choice but to go back to the fundamentals – that is, to recommit to faithful adherence to the principles and purposes enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. This reaffirmation must recognize that these principles are universal and timeless and that adherence to these principles by all States, big or small, is central to the integrity of the rules-based international order. It must also include a renewed commitment to and faithful compliance with international treaties, Security Council resolutions and international law. With this framework taken as a baseline, efforts must commence for a revival of a global consensus on arms control and disarmament on the basis of equity, balance, restraint and cooperation among States. We are mindful that consensus-building will be difficult, given the daunting challenges – but also the dividends that may accrue – but it is a task that we ignore to our collective peril.

Let me present some of the essential ingredients of consensus-building. First, we have to start from the same basic premise – that is, the recognition of the right to equal security for all States. Mr. President, you refer to the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which unanimously agreed to the principle of equal security for all States in both the conventional and the non-conventional fields and at the regional as well as the international levels. This is an essential prerequisite for progress in the areas that this Conference is seized of and can work on.

Second, we must address the motives which drive States to acquire weapons to defend themselves. These motives include perceived threats from superior conventional or non-conventional forces, the existence of disputes and conflicts with more powerful States and discrimination in the application of international norms and laws.

Third, the nuclear-weapon States must demonstrate a renewed commitment to achieving nuclear disarmament within a reasonable time frame to revalidate the original bargain. Without this commitment, the bargain of the non-proliferation regime will continue to erode. The eventual objective must be the total elimination of nuclear weapons within the context of a re-energized collective security system.

Fourth, as a pragmatic step towards disarmament, the nuclear-weapon States need to halt future production and eliminate all existing stocks of fissile materials through a non-discriminatory fissile material treaty.

Fifth, until nuclear disarmament is achieved, non-nuclear-weapon States should be given assurances that they will not be subjected to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The security assurances offered by nuclear-weapon States need to be translated into a universal, unconditional and legally binding treaty.

Sixth, we must generate a universal and non-discriminatory agreement for addressing concerns that arise from the development, deployment and proliferation of anti-ballistic missile systems. These are inherently destabilizing while being of dubious reliability in any case.

Seventh, we must strengthen the international legal regime in order to prevent demilitarization of outer space.

Eighth, an agreed criteria-based and non-discriminatory approach must be taken to promote the peaceful uses of nuclear energy under appropriate international safeguards, in accordance with the international obligations of States.

Ninth, the development and use of lethal autonomous weapons systems need to be brought under international regulation.

Tenth, regional security issues must be addressed through dialogue and diplomacy – that is, the creation of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East and a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

Lastly, given the direct causal relationship between conventional weapons and the continuing reliance on nuclear weapons, and in view of the increasing number and sophistication of conventional weapons, it is essential to pursue balanced reduction of armed forces and conventional armaments, especially at the regional and subregional levels.

Mr. President, the fragility of the global security order demands that the arms control architecture be enabled to prevent outbreaks and intensification of tensions on land, at sea and in space and cyberspace. Global, regional and subregional approaches to arms control would therefore require a mutually reinforcing framework that is anchored in the United Nations Charter, international law and the principles of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. The rules-based international order and multilateralism are not a simple aggregation of national interests. No such aggregation is possible, given the varied interests of States. What is and should be possible is to shape the global order and multilateralism in our enlightened self-interest in a way that fosters diplomacy, negotiations and demonstration of political will to abide by the rule of law.

The President: I thank Ambassador Hashmi for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency. I now give the floor to Ambassador Li Song of China, to be followed by Ambassador Beerwerth of Germany.

Mr. Li Song (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Mr. President, after a long recess of three months owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Conference has finally resumed its meetings today. I am very pleased to return to the Palais des Nations and to see my colleagues from the various countries again, and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to you personally, the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, and the secretariat for your efforts. The Chinese delegation will actively support you in your endeavours. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency and at the same time warmly welcome Ambassador Sabri Bachtobji of Tunisia, Ambassador Lim Sang-beom of the Republic of Korea and Ambassador Federico Villegas of Argentina as they assume their posts. I look forward to working in close cooperation with them.

Mr. President, the COVID-19 pandemic is the common enemy of all of humankind and a challenge faced jointly by all the countries of the world. Is combating the pandemic a matter for rational science, or for the sowing of political divisions? Is it a matter of learning from one another with mutual respect, or of casting blame and passing the buck? Of strengthening international cooperation, or of cutting ties and going it alone? Of ensuring multilateral coordination, or of pursuing unilateralism? The choice made by each country will need to stand the test of time. The international response to the pandemic has further demonstrated the crucial importance of a continued commitment to multilateralism, solidarity and cooperation, which remain the best guarantee that we will finally prevail over the pandemic and jointly build a community of a shared future for humankind.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to the international political and security scene. Political viruses are generating shockwaves in relations among major countries, with continuous repudiations and withdrawals from treaties. The new space force now has its own flag. Nevertheless, in a special year marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations and the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the members of the international community have in vast numbers reaffirmed their unwavering support for multilateralism and the existing international arms control and non-proliferation regime.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, discussions and reflections continued online, focusing on topics such as the post-bilateral world and a new era for arms control. The course of history moves ahead one step at a time. The post-bilateral world must not write off the special responsibilities and duties in terms of nuclear disarmament of the country with the largest nuclear arsenal. Arms control in the new era must be based on full respect for history and for fulfilling commitments, enhancing international trust and upholding international security. Major countries should respect one another, avoid conflicts and confrontation and enhance strategic trust as important premises and guarantees in the international arms control process. No country should put its narrow interests before those of others or present itself as an exception to multilateral arms control.

Mr. President, in the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, China was the first to take decisive action, in line with its overriding desire to save lives. In the process, China has endured enormous losses and made tremendous sacrifices. By actively supporting the World Health Organization and engaging in extensive international assistance and cooperation, China has made a significant contribution to safeguarding global security in public health. This demonstrates our country's sense of responsibility towards multilateralism and international solidarity and cooperation.

At the same time, China has moved ahead in making its contribution to advancing the international arms control process. I am pleased to inform the Conference that on 20 June the National People's Congress adopted a decision on the country's accession to the Arms Trade Treaty, thus signalling the completion of the adoption of major domestic legislation and legal procedures paving the way for the country's accession to that instrument in the near future. When other parties walk away, we deliver. My country's contribution to the Arms Trade Treaty is another major move promoting multilateralism and pushing forward the building of a community of a shared future. It will have a very positive impact, boosting the universality and effectiveness of the instrument.

During the lockdown, I kept to my daily schedule in my office and remained in close contact with colleagues from all delegations, exchanging and coordinating views on activities in the Conference and on the United Nations General Assembly's First Committee, the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. My team and I are looking forward to working proactively during the Conference's remaining time this year. We are ready to embark on frank and in-depth discussions with all delegations on outstanding issues, including the profound impact of the global political and security situation on international arms control, the future prospects for and orientation of multilateral arms control, strategic stability, nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We are ready to engage with all delegations in substantive work in all these areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also focused international attention on biosecurity. On the one hand, disarmament teams in Geneva need to make full use of the institutional platform of the Biological Weapons Convention in order to strengthen the biosecurity of all countries and to bolster international cooperation in this field, and also to strengthen the institution of the Biological Weapons Convention, including by means of negotiations to conclude its verification protocol. On the other hand, we also need to consider what role the Conference can play in enhancing biosecurity. The Russian draft for an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism merits careful examination on the part of all delegations.

I hope the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, will produce a comprehensive and balanced meeting schedule to address the topics I have just mentioned, based on full consultation with all delegations, so that the Conference can conduct its work in a smooth and systematic manner.

The President: I thank Ambassador Li Song for his statement and for the kind words for the presidency. I will now give the floor to Ambassador Beerwerth of Germany, to be followed by the representative of Italy, who will be speaking remotely.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Mr. President, dear colleagues, I would like to welcome Austria to the presidency in these particularly challenging times, and I would like to pledge my delegation's full support to Austria in its discharge of the presidency. Let me, like others speaking before me, also commend the outgoing presidency – that of Australia – for its continuation of our work, even though it could take place only bilaterally. And I would like to welcome the new colleagues here in the Conference on Disarmament.

It is good to be back for an in-person meeting, Mr. President. That is a feeling I think quite a number of us in the room have here. And for that, I would like to thank you and the secretariat for your tireless efforts. Politically, the message that the Conference is working again with in-person meetings is an important signal, in particular in the current difficult international security and arms control climate.

I am planning not to make a general policy statement but to focus on a number of very specific items. Of course, Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

First, then, we very much welcome the high-level discussions that took place in Vienna on the New START on 22 June. We note with satisfaction that expert and political-level discussions will continue on the matter. It has long been my Government's position that this landmark treaty should not lapse without an extension or successor agreement in place. It is in our common security interest not to enter into a period without a single legally binding instrument limiting nuclear weapons.

Second, as regards the remainder of this year's session of the Conference, let us be realistic and acknowledge that due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation, there will unfortunately be very little time for in-depth, substantial work on our agenda items. In the time left, fissile material and the prevention of an arms race in outer space are the most important topics in my delegation's view. A fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of the Shannon mandate has, in our view, long been ready for negotiation. And the prevention of an arms race in outer space urgently needs attention as a result of increasing space-related risks. Let us also be practical and reserve sufficient time for discussing and adopting this year's report, however short it may be – unfortunately, I would like to add.

Third, I would like to debrief you on the virtual meeting of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, which took place on 9 June. Let me remind you that the Initiative is designed as a bridge-building initiative for the first pillar of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), where the divisions run deeper than in any other pillar. The members of the Initiative will continue in their endeavour to inject new dynamism into nuclear disarmament through practical and realistic steps. The group is envisaging a continued dialogue with States parties to the Treaty, nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States alike, on practical steps to further nuclear disarmament. Finally, the group is planning to submit the

document on 22 stepping stones to advancing nuclear disarmament as a working paper at the NPT Review Conference.

With that, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and express my hope that we will be able to continue with in-person meetings and at least some substantial work during your presidency and the following presidency, under Bangladesh.

The President: I thank Ambassador Beerwerth for his statement and his kind words for the presidency. I would now like to give the floor to the representative of Italy, Mr. Francese, who will speak remotely, to be followed by Ambassador Flores Liera of Mexico.

Mr. Francese (Italy) (*spoke via video link*): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, let me congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and, especially, commend you and your team, in coordination with the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, and with the precious support of the secretariat, for having spared no effort to allow us to be here again, in a setting that, though perhaps different, is still safe and inclusive. Please be assured of our delegation's full support and cooperation.

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me add some brief remarks in my national capacity.

As the year's session began, we stated how deeply troubling the current international scenario is, with heightened international and regional tensions. Today, after having experienced the global catastrophe that is the present pandemic, we must not and cannot turn a blind eye to our collective responsibilities towards international security. It is of utmost urgency that we act with determination to safeguard and even to strengthen the international disarmament architecture, avoiding setting out on the path of a new arms race in any domain.

For these reasons, Italy also fully supports the United Nations Secretary-General's call for an immediate ceasefire in all corners of the world and is strongly in favour of referring to this call in all relevant forums. It is time to put armed conflicts on lockdown, while focusing all together on the fight against the coronavirus.

Mr. President, as you noted in your statement, 2020 was supposed to be a special year for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, the fiftieth anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the forty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention, and a calendar full of activities for our common work.

We should still have the opportunity to mark this year as a different one, but not because of the tragic events caused by this invisible enemy called the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Let's mark this year as the moment when our countries truly realized that effective multilateralism and a rules-based international system are the only path to success, the only tools for effective and long-term results. Let's remember this chapter of history as the moment when, having in mind the public and global challenges posed by the coronavirus, we put our differences aside and were able to build on our common interest for peace and security.

New and complex challenges lie ahead for the disarmament regime – namely, the risk of nuclear proliferation, the deplorable use of chemical weapons and the need to improve biosecurity and biosafety, not to mention some important humanitarian aspects linked to non-international armed conflicts, the proliferation of non-State armed groups and the growing difficulty of distinguishing between combatants and civilians, terrorism and cyberattacks.

The Conference on Disarmament, as the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating body, could play a crucial role with regard to these challenges. We should not lose another opportunity here. Even if in the remaining months of this year it will be difficult to agree on a programme of work, we could use our time – as the Australian presidency so wisely began to do – to cross bridges and get ready to finally break the deadlock. If this deadlock was simply regrettable some months ago, now it is absolutely unacceptable.

The President: I thank the representative of Italy for his statement and for his kind words. I now give the floor to Ambassador Flores Liera of Mexico, to be followed by Ambassador Mailu of Kenya.

Ms. Flores Liera (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. It is a great pleasure to participate in this meeting of the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of Austria. We are aware of your country's historical commitment to disarmament and we offer you our fullest cooperation to ensure that your tenure is a successful one, despite the difficult and extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves. I, too, would like to welcome the new representatives of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia, and to extend them our cooperation.

I would also like to place on record our appreciation of the work done by the delegation of Australia during its presidency. Despite the fact that circumstances prevented the holding of formal meetings, the efforts it made and the extensive bilateral consultations it conducted have helped to conceptualize some of the causes of the Conference's paralysis and to identify viable ways to take forward its mandate. This year's cooperation between the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, is an excellent practice, which we hope will continue in the future.

Mr President, we face complex and dangerous times. Much of the disarmament and arms control architecture is being eroded by the same countries that helped build it and which used to understand its importance. In addition, the demise of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the most likely demise of the Treaty on Open Skies, and the possibility of the demise of the New START, unless it is extended or a subsequent treaty is negotiated, present a daunting prospect. At the same time, we note the encouraging news that the United States of America and the Russian Federation commenced a bilateral dialogue last week. We encourage both countries to spare no effort to fulfil their fundamental responsibility to contribute to a safer world free of nuclear weapons.

Despite the unprecedented emergency that the pandemic has created, we keep hearing that some States might restart the testing of nuclear weapons and that they will continue to increase their military expenditure, modernizing their nuclear arsenals in a manner contrary to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This is distressing, given the enormous shortcomings in addressing the current crisis and its impact on our societies' social and economic structures.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has shown that there are other imminent global security threats that demand our attention, and which confirm that no one is safe if we are not all safe. It also proves that the only way to address international security concerns is through a strengthened multilateral system that prioritizes cooperation in meeting new and persistent challenges, especially the risk of the use of nuclear weapons, since there is no possible preparation that would allow the world to deal with the consequences of a detonation. We are aware of the geopolitical situation and that mistrust between the Powers persists and is deepening. Yet we believe that crises such as the one we are currently experiencing should be translated into opportunities, but that requires real leadership.

The postponement of the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) gives us extra space to reflect upon and identify ways of generating the synergies and agreements that will allow us to move forward on the three pillars of the Treaty. We cannot afford to waste this unexpected opportunity; doing so would irretrievably weaken the regime as a whole. One particular challenge is that of restoring the efficiency of the disarmament machinery. To this end, consideration must be given to whether this structure established in 1978 is still fit for purpose, taking into account its sclerotic nature and chronic decline over more than two decades, despite the still very obvious threat of nuclear weapons. Recent examples, such as the Humanitarian Initiative on the Impact of Nuclear Weapons and the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, have shown that agreements can be reached if the political will exists. Practical, innovative, creative solutions are needed to break the deadlock. Some of them have already been set out in the Agenda for Disarmament of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. What is required now is to give this machinery an injection of positive energy.

Under these circumstances, it is appropriate to reiterate the imperative need for the Conference to resume its role and to fulfil its negotiating mandate. The delegation of Mexico considers that the vast majority of the Conference's agenda items are relevant and therefore

subject to negotiations. The top priority is nuclear disarmament, and it would be a good idea to explore the agreement reached in the 2010 NPT Review Conference action plan to establish a subsidiary body to examine various negotiating mandates. The subsidiary body would serve as a repository of proposals, on the basis of which it would be possible to plot a route towards negotiations for the elimination of nuclear weapons. It is also essential to move forward in negotiating a treaty banning the production and storage of fissile material and a treaty preventing an arms race in outer space, and to make progress on negative security assurances. Undoubtedly, there are new challenges that could also be included on the Conference's agenda, such as the threats posed by artificial intelligence for military purposes, and technological developments and their impact on international security.

Mr. President, before concluding, my delegation would like to place on record its support for the initiative presented by the delegation of Australia on technical amendments to the Conference's rules of procedure to make its wording gender-neutral. We hope that work on this can be resumed in short order. The proposed text is limited, simple, concrete, necessary, uncontroversial and consistent with the egalitarian agenda promoted by the United Nations. If the Conference were not able to agree to an initiative of this nature, one would have to ask whether this body would be able to achieve anything. Finally, we would like to say goodbye to those colleagues who have left, or are about to leave, including Vanessa Wood, and to wish them every success for the future.

The President: I thank Ambassador Flores Liera for her statement and for her kind words for the President, and I now give the floor to Ambassador Mailu of Kenya, to be followed by Ambassador Ahsan of Bangladesh.

Mr. Mailu (Kenya): Thank you, Mr. President. Kenya aligns itself with the statement delivered by Egypt on behalf of the Group of 21. At the outset, my delegation extends its sincere congratulations to Austria and to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency and I assure you of Kenya's full support and cooperation.

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome our new colleagues to the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me, too, Mr. President, to commend the Ambassador of Australia for her exemplary stewardship of the Conference on Disarmament despite the difficult circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which did not permit this assembly to complete its work during the first part under her presidency. Nevertheless, the delegation of Kenya appreciated the steadfast engagement that the Australian presidency maintained with the delegations, as well as the opportunity for virtual briefings with the regional groups. The efforts in championing the technical updates on the gender dimensions to the rules of procedure are commendable. We are convinced that these efforts should be carried forward.

Our meeting is taking place against the backdrop of immense challenges facing the community of nations. COVID-19, the worst pandemic in over a hundred years, has affected our daily lives and the manner in which we diplomats must conduct our work from now on. Governments across the globe are working tirelessly to combat the spread of this deadly virus. This invisible virus has posed an existential threat to humanity and has demonstrated that all States, big and small, nuclear Powers and non-nuclear-weapon States, are vulnerable in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like every other aspect of life that has been affected by this virus, the United Nations, the bedrock of multilateralism, which marks seventy-five years of its existence this year, has not been spared. The rules-based international system has had to adapt to the new normal in order to ensure that global discourse on a whole range of issues is sustained. Closer to home, the Conference on Disarmament had to abruptly end the first part of the session in March and delayed the start of the second part. Our presence in the room testifies to the measures that we must now be accustomed to.

We have all witnessed the disturbing developments in the areas of arms control, disarmament and international security. The findings in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute *Yearbook 2020*, released on 15 June, paint a grim picture of the state of disarmament and international security. According to the *Yearbook*, despite another decrease in the number of nuclear warheads in 2019, all nuclear-weapon-possessing States continued to modernize their nuclear arsenals. In addition, there is the continued rise in military spending and the heightened uncertainty of the international arms control regime.

Nevertheless, a glimmer of hope presented itself in the negotiations that took place in Austria last week. We hope that the coming together of minds will herald the beginning of better days for the arms control architecture. We will remain cautiously optimistic.

Mr. President, Kenya welcomes your focus on multilateralism during your presidency. In this regard, Kenya reaffirms the Conference on Disarmament as the single multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament. Since its recognition in 1979, at the first special session on disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament's unique mandate on multilateral arms control and disarmament issues has made it an integral forum for the maintenance of global peace and security. Despite the challenges that this Conference has faced over the past two decades, we remain hopeful that, with more concerted efforts and a willingness to compromise and demonstrate flexibility, it is not too late to achieve progress.

The Conference has in the past demonstrated its ability to deliver on its mandate. There has never been a greater imperative for the it to do so than now, when new, invisible threats to the stability of mankind have the potential to wipe away in a flash the progress that it has taken humanity decades to achieve. This, together with the turbulent international security landscape, requires this important body to rise up and do much more, so that it may achieve its mandate not just for ourselves but also for the generations to come.

Kenya remains steadfast in its commitment to the Conference on Disarmament. We are hopeful that, with the requisite political will, this important body can rise above the challenges and make its crucial contribution to international peace and security, as it has done in the past.

In conclusion, Mr. President, while the Conference on Disarmament remains the preserve of member States, Kenya commends your efforts to engage with the civil society. The views of civil society may be valuable in providing insightful perspectives on disarmament and security in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, Kenya looks forward to the event scheduled for Friday, 3 July, under the title "The Conference on Disarmament meets civil society: Lessons of the pandemic – rethinking the nexus between disarmament and security".

The President: I thank Ambassador Mailu for his statement and for his kind words and would now like to give the floor to Ambassador Ahsan of Bangladesh, to be followed by Ambassador Tressler Zamorano of Chile.

Mr. Ahsan (Bangladesh): Mr. President, thank you, and congratulations on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

The world is smarting under an unprecedented triple crisis in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which encompasses health, the economy and security. Indeed, the pandemic has adversely affected not just the health but almost every other sphere of the life of the international community. And, given the all-pervasive impact of the pandemic and the marshalling of resources to fight it, all concerned should support and implement the United Nations Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire in all corners of the world.

While the situation in a few countries is improving slowly, it could not be said that we have overcome the crisis. Amid such a difficult situation, we have gathered here in today's meeting thanks to the goodwill and positive approach of Conference member States. In this regard, Mr. President, you and your team deserve our appreciation for your diligence, tenacity and commitment in convening this plenary meeting. I would like to assure you of my delegation's full support for your endeavours. Let me also express our sincere appreciation for previous presidencies – those of Algeria and Argentina – for their sustained efforts to move things forward, as well as to Australia for its very constructive and sagacious approach to the work of the Conference work during the peak of the pandemic.

Bangladesh remains a staunch supporter of a multilateral approach to general and complete disarmament. Bangladesh is committed to the objectives of disarmament and non-proliferation, attaching the highest priority to the Conference's agenda on nuclear disarmament. We are prepared to work with all delegations in the Conference and in other multilateral disarmament forums towards our shared objectives. In order to reach our long-sought goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, all Conference member States

should come forward with political commitment, flexibility and a spirit of accommodation. The delegation of Bangladesh looks forward to working with all in good faith as a member State during its upcoming presidency of the Conference.

Mr. President, as the next President, Bangladesh wishes to assure you, the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session and other member States of its intention to continue with the collegial spirit and solidarity that the group of the six States that will hold the presidency this year have been upholding since the beginning of the year. One must acknowledge, though, that the current situation makes it particularly challenging for smaller delegations to conduct full-range substantive work in the Conference. Of note is the recent experience with technical issues when work was attempted in remote mode. Matters have been further complicated for the servicing role of the Office for Disarmament Affairs due to other major meetings' coinciding with the Conference session. Within these limitations, we will do our best to move forward in a constructive manner through consultations with member States.

In conclusion, I wish to welcome all new colleagues who have just joined us in the Conference recently.

The President: I thank Ambassador Ahsan for his statement and for his kind words for the President. Now I would like to give the floor to Ambassador Tressler Zamorano of Chile, to be followed by Ambassador Hakala of Finland.

Mr. Tressler Zamorano (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by welcoming our new colleagues, the Ambassadors of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia. Then, Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference and wish you every success in completing the task you have been set. You can count on Chile, which will continue to participate constructively in the Conference's deliberations, particularly in view of the exceptional circumstances we have had to face because of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. For Chile, it is a source of satisfaction that the presidency is being assumed by a delegation of a country with which we share common values – such as recognition of the importance of strengthening the international legal system and of promoting the peaceful resolution of disputes through multilateralism – and especially a common vision of the need to put human beings at the centre of our deliberations. I extend our appreciation and gratitude to the presidencies of Algeria, Argentina and Australia, and to the other Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, for their work. Their dedication has allowed us to be here today.

From an early stage in its history, Chile, as a Member State of the United Nations, has demonstrated its firm commitment to multilateralism, disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation as the foundational elements of collective security, and to the obligations of international cooperation that these elements entail. We have thus joined the general effort to prevent proliferation and eliminate not only weapons of mass destruction, but also those conventional weapons considered incompatible with international humanitarian and human rights law.

We are aware that, in order to establish the conceptual and legal framework for a multilateral agenda of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, in keeping with Article 7 of the Charter of the United Nations, we must create conditions of trust that may bring about the consensus we need to make progress towards a world that reflects our ideals of peace and international security. We reiterate our political will to achieve the objectives for which the Conference was established. Yet today we are witnessing actions that directly weaken the multilateral system in which the international security architecture is embedded.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and international arms control stand at a crossroads and face a number of major challenges. It has been suggested that the so-called new normality that the pandemic has imposed on us in the area of international security could result in an alarming lowering of the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons and the tacit acceptance of new battle-fronts in outer space and cyberspace. Technological developments and their military applications raise new ethical and legal questions, whose ramifications we are only now beginning to fully understand. This situation highlights the vulnerability of instruments that the international community has taken for granted for decades and which, should it

persist, will mean a serious setback for international stability as each State seeks unilateral military and strategic advantages. It would be naive of us to claim that the deadlock in the sphere of disarmament – which reflects the difficulties of the international political situation, given concrete form in the Conference's impasse of more than two decades – has not diminished the Conference's international credibility and the hopes that have been pinned on it since its inception.

In addition to the lack of results, the Conference faces a complex scenario in respect of its traditional agenda items, with the emergence, at dizzying speed, of multiple contemporary challenges to security agendas. The pandemic has shown how new international security challenges can be added to traditional ones, and has certainly highlighted the need for an inclusive, multilateral approach to address them effectively. In this respect, the Conference needs to be reconnected to the reality that exists outside of this chamber to bring it closer to the concerns of our countries' societies, for the sake of transparency and the pressing need to restore its legitimacy in the eyes of national onlookers.

This Conference, which was established as a multilateral forum for the discussion and negotiation of multilateral disarmament instruments, cannot be described as a wasted opportunity. We should recall that our predecessors negotiated the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, to name but the most important, in its midst. However, for more than 20 years, the Conference has not been in a position to do anything to consolidate international stability through the negotiation of multilateral instruments in accordance with its mandate. Nevertheless, if one thing has become clear to us during this global health crisis, it is the need for global coordination and the multilateral track to tackle conflicts and shared problems. It remains to be seen whether we, the member States, can make the Conference equal to this challenge.

Mr. President, COVID-19 has in practice meant diverting the focus of attention towards pressing life-and-death problems. This in turn has led to the postponement of decisions in a large number of international political processes, pending further clarification of the current circumstances. But while we wait, the multilateral system as we knew it has rapidly deteriorated. We must avoid falling into a permissive passivity.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I repeat our wishes for the success of your presidency and our country's willingness to contribute to the work of the Conference. We will do so in a constructive spirit, in the search for the consensus that will allow us to make progress in our urgent common endeavours, within the framework of an effectively renewed multilateralism, which can serve as the basis for dialogue and cooperation in the area of international security.

The President: I thank Ambassador Tressler Zamorano for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency. I now give the floor to Ambassador Hakala, to be followed by the representative of Norway.

Ms. Hakala (Finland): Mr. President, let me wish you every success as the President of the Conference on Disarmament in these challenging times. Thanks to your tireless efforts, we can meet here today.

In disarmament, where we not only exchange information and views but also protect vital interests, no digital alternative can replace physical meetings. Mr. President, once again, let me assure you of the full support of my delegation.

Distinguished delegates, in addition to the European Union statement, I would like to make some national remarks. No sector, no activity, has been left unaffected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the respective restrictive measures. Disarmament is no exception. In these difficult times, disarmament cannot exist in a silo. The pandemic has revealed global human security vulnerabilities for which weapons are of no help. But the arms control sector can contribute to better responses – for example, when it comes to the implementation of conventions like the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. At the same time, we need a broader and more comprehensive understanding of what security means.

What about the Conference on Disarmament itself? On top of the COVID reality, it goes without saying that times are difficult for arms control and disarmament and for multilateral cooperation in general. At the Conference on Disarmament, we should, however, focus on a fresh and new start. It will not be easy, I am afraid. But, instead of increasing the deficit of trust, we should try to find ways to improve transparency and trust. In spite of a stalemate of two decades, the Conference still has a significant role to play as a forum for the discussion of key global security concerns.

Let us try, then, to graduate to the next level. Building, or rather rebuilding, trust must be the main aim of our deliberations this year. Let me emphasize the following: we are here because strengthening the international arms control architecture requires building trust and confidence among States, guarantees of compliance with agreements and accountability where there is non-compliance. It requires strong multilateral institutions and effective national implementation, supported by international capacity-building efforts. To advance all these matters is our shared responsibility, one that should guide all our work this autumn. In this increasingly volatile environment, the predictability and stability that effective arms control instruments can provide is more important than ever. The New START, with its comprehensive transparency mechanism, is a case in point. We call on the United States and Russia to extend the New START. An early extension would provide the time needed for dialogue on new arrangements, including on non-strategic nuclear weapons.

We know from history that, in a tense security climate, escalation can happen very fast. Tools to increase transparency and trust and to manage crises are vital to reducing the risk of the use of nuclear weapons. Finland has been active in searching for practical means to reduce nuclear risks. We are committed to facilitating concrete efforts to reduce risk. Finland has also engaged actively in the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. Our aim is an effective normative framework for lethal autonomous weapons systems adopted by consensus by all parties to the process. It is an ambitious aim but one that Finland will fully strive for. For negotiations on this extremely complex topic, the Geneva Group of Governmental Experts is the appropriate forum, the only game in town. With patience and flexibility on all sides, we will be able to reach an outcome that all parties can commit to. We should strive for nothing less.

Finally, Mr. President, as this will most likely be my last time as Permanent Representative of Finland to this Conference, I would like to thank you all for these past four years. It has been an honour and pleasure to work with all of you while welcoming new colleagues to Geneva, I wish you all well in your professional and private lives.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador Hakala, for your statement and your kind words. I wish you all the best. I now give the floor to the representative of Norway, to be followed by Ambassador Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies of Spain.

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President. I would like to express Norway's appreciation to Austria for organizing today's meeting despite the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

While we all need to continue to be vigilant in order to fight the pandemic, we agree that the time has come to restart meetings and processes. This includes physical meetings, as long as they can be organized in a way that is safe and inclusive for all.

We are pleased that extensive consultations led you to decide to resume the work of the Conference on Disarmament, including in a physical form. We all need to be flexible and find the best possible working methods for the time ahead, for as long as the pandemic is with us, in order to make progress.

We need a Conference on Disarmament that engages with the substance of its agenda. Only then can the Conference fulfil its mandate. We therefore regret that the Conference has again this year been unable to agree on a programme of work. However, we would like to commend this year's Presidents for their efforts, including meetings held on thematic issues such as gender and disarmament under Argentina's presidency.

I would also like to thank the outgoing presidency, that of Australia, for its hard work and the consultations conducted during the presidency.

We need to have a substantive discussion in the Conference on nuclear disarmament verification, which is also called for in General Assembly resolution 74/50. This is but one issue we hope the Conference will engage on in the future, as we endeavour to get back to substantive work in this body.

The President: I thank the representative of Norway for her statement and for her kind words for the presidency. I would now like to give the floor to Ambassador Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies of Spain, to be followed by Ambassador Izquierdo Miño of Ecuador, who will be speaking remotely.

Mr. Sánchez de Lerín García-Ovies (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you, Mr. President. I am enormously pleased to be back at the Conference, although I regret that it cannot be in the Council Chamber – a historic venue, and not only because of the murals by the Spanish painter Josep Maria Sert. Today we welcome new colleagues from Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia, with whom we hope to work very actively. At the outset I would like to congratulate Australia, not only on having assumed its presidency in strange, not to say unprecedented, conditions, but above all for its patience, tenacity and perseverance. During its constructive and useful presidency, Australia kept the consultation process active and introduced the idea of working on the rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral. I also congratulate Austria, which has started its work with commendable enthusiasm, has shown great courage in bringing us back to the meeting room and is working hard to ensure that this Conference proves its usefulness in spite of everything. Spain aligns itself with the statement of the European Union, as delivered by the delegation currently holding its presidency.

Mr President, this pandemic is affecting everyone and has forced our Governments to take exceptional measures. Our societies have been confined in circumstances that we could not have imagined. Our borders have been closed, revealing our fear of contagion, and international cooperation has been hampered. Our conception of the world and of coexistence has been shown to be very vulnerable. Even considering only the role of the Conference, the pandemic has revealed the limitations of multilateralism and the difficulty of implementing arms control and disarmament measures in strange circumstances. I say all of this without forgetting the suffering of people who have been infected by the virus or who have experienced the disease at close quarters, and extend our heartfelt sympathy for the victims. The pandemic has increased the vulnerability of those who were already the weakest and most vulnerable.

I am, however, a person who considers himself an optimist and who wakes up each morning with hope that it will be a great day. That is why I want to see opportunities in this pandemic, as well as lessons. The first conclusion I draw is that diplomacy has been proven to be about people. It is people, not abstract entities or impersonal bodies, who engage in dialogue, who listen to each other, and who negotiate. Not only do we need to talk to each other, but we also need to see each other. Written procedures are not enough to move things forward; we need looks and gestures in order to empathize with and understand each other. Diplomacy succeeds as an experience lived by people; without contact, there is no progress.

The second conclusion is that we can only guarantee our security if we act collectively and in a coordinated manner. In the panic, the closure of borders hampered cooperation. Yet insofar as communication channels have worked, we have been able to gradually overcome the obstacles. The response to the crisis is collective, not national, as the World Health Organization has demonstrated through its consensus resolution. We are a connected and united world, and I hope that this sentiment will take hold in this forum, too.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the need for solidarity. In the darkest moments, when our own systems were struggling, we continued to seek cooperation. There were others who were more vulnerable, who had greater difficulties. Spain has suffered badly, but it has not ceased providing assistance to those who request it.

These conclusions demonstrate that the Conference needs to return to work. It also needs to justify its existence; something that is only possible if we adopt a programme of work. We already know that we are not in a position to take on a negotiating mandate overnight. But returning to substantive dialogue is the first step in a negotiating process. The mandate cannot come out of nowhere; first it requires a dialogue that establishes mutual trust

and creates room for negotiation. That is why it is imperative to adopt a programme of work, even if it does not contain a negotiating mandate: it would be the first step towards rebuilding trust and making it possible to return to negotiations in this forum within a sensible period of time.

Let me also say a word about our most recent debate on the topic of gender. We must now take action and identify measures whereby we can make a difference. I said in March that Spain has mainstreamed the gender perspective in its diplomacy. For that reason, we support the proposal to make the rules of procedure gender-neutral and we will work actively to achieve this.

Lastly, Mr. President, taking into account what I have said and considering the current global circumstances, Spain wishes to make the most of our return to work by highlighting the need to negotiate a legally binding verification protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. This pandemic, like previous epidemics, has revealed this serious shortcoming. An urgent response is now required and it is our duty to take on this mandate.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador, for your statement, for your optimism and for your kind words for me. I will now give the floor to Ambassador Zniber of Morocco.

Mr. Zniber (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Let me begin by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of the Conference and wishing you every success in your work. I would also like to thank the Australian presidency for its commendable efforts under exceptional conditions, which did not prevent it from holding active consultations on a wide range of issues. In this regard, I would like to reiterate my delegation's support for the Australian proposal for technical amendments to the rules of procedure to enshrine gender neutrality in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to welcome our new colleagues, the Ambassadors of the Republic of Korea, Tunisia and Argentina, and wish them every success in our joint work.

This plenary meeting is taking place at a crucial and encouraging stage in the Conference's existence. It comes after a break, which was enforced but, I hope, beneficial to the activities of the multilateral disarmament system. This enforced break, as everyone knows, coincided with some extremely important events, including the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the tenth NPT Review Conference, of which many had high hopes of seeing the emergence of an international consensus on the absolute priority to be accorded to the Treaty and its pillars. The importance of this commemoration led Morocco to join with many other States in subscribing to a joint communiqué aimed at reinforcing the Treaty in the very specific context currently faced by the international disarmament architecture.

I would like to reaffirm my country's strong commitment to contributing to the active and effective relaunch of our body. We cannot let it move away from the essence of its original way of working and thus be responsible for its continued regrettable failure, which has been ongoing now for over two decades. While the current situation complicates matters, we must not use that as a reason to stop making progress in debates and overcoming the political divisions liable to affect the international security climate. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has contributed to an increase in and intensification of humanitarian crises. They are now exacerbated by the climate of instability brought about by conflicts and threats to peace and security; as we have seen, the call by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to end hostilities unfortunately did not elicit the necessary response that was essential in such circumstances. That is why it is now more than time to strengthen our body and its activities by reviving its initial mandate and negotiating binding multilateral treaties in the face of all the real threats, of which there are unfortunately all too many in view on the international stage.

Mr. President, on behalf of my delegation – and I believe that the sentiment is widely shared – I wish to recall the many statements that we made last year and at the start of 2020, in which we set out our concrete ideas and proposals on the method to use to adopt a balanced programme of work suited to the need for urgent negotiations on the essential questions we consider to be priorities, namely nuclear disarmament, a ban on the production and stockpiling of fissile material and the prevention of an arms race in outer space in the light

of newly available dual-use technologies that must be confined to strictly peaceful applications. As we all know, disarmament is one of the *raison d'être* of the United Nations. Real and effective disarmament commensurate with peace and security throughout the world can only be achieved if it is promoted at the multilateral level. That is why we are calling on all members of the Conference to show the necessary flexibility so that honest and fruitful discussions can bring us back to resuming tangible work and determining the common denominators for negotiations, which are more pressing than ever in the context of the Conference.

The President: I thank Ambassador Zniber for his statement as well as for his kind words for me. I will now invite the representative of Malaysia to take the floor.

Mr. Anwar (Malaysia): Mr. President, Malaysia would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you and convey our support for you and your team in the discharge of this important responsibility. We thank you, the group of the year's six Presidents and the secretariat for your commitment and hard work in convening this meeting. We would also like to express our appreciation to Ambassador Sally Mansfield of Australia and her delegation for their initiatives and efforts undertaken throughout Australia's presidency. We join others in welcoming the Permanent Representatives of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia to the Conference on Disarmament. Malaysia aligns itself with the statement delivered by Egypt on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, you have taken over at the helm of this important body when the entire world continues to struggle against one of the biggest challenges it has ever faced in modern times. For the past three months, the world has been battling the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has now resulted in more than 10 million infections and 500,000 deaths worldwide. My delegation wishes to offer its sincere condolences to everyone who has lost loved ones, relatives, friends and colleagues due to this dreadful virus. Indeed, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating and far-reaching. Everything in our lives has drastically changed. We can see the changes in our homes, offices, schools and social spaces. The truth is that we have yet to see the full and lasting impact to fully comprehend what we need to do after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Conference, too, has felt the impact of the pandemic. For many weeks, we were unable to convene almost all of our meetings due to the restrictions that were in place. And now, we continue to face challenges in planning our future work due to uncertainties caused by the persistent threat of the virus.

Mr. President, Malaysia appreciates your engagement in the Group of 21 meeting some two weeks ago and welcomes your proposal for this Conference to resume its session with a general debate. As we cautiously proceed to figure out our new normal, Malaysia hopes that under your leadership, there will be more engagement to explore all possible options in our efforts to continue and advance the work of the Conference as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the importance of solidarity and multilateral cooperation in achieving what is in our common interest. Malaysia reaffirms that multilateralism is the core principle of negotiation in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. In this regard, we welcome and support the aspiration that you expressed in your letter, dated 12 June, to promote trust and confidence among the States members of the Conference.

In relation to the proposed programme of work, Malaysia believes that all delegates should show strong political will and a genuine spirit of compromise in order to break the stalemate. Malaysia has always shown its willingness to exercise flexibility. We stand ready to support any effort towards revitalizing the work of the Conference.

Before I conclude, I would like to share with all delegations that Malaysia and 16 other countries issued a joint communiqué on 19 May to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In the joint communiqué, we highlighted several elements, which we believe to be useful, for consideration at the upcoming NPT Review Conference. Malaysia remains committed and

looks forward to continuing to work with all States parties to the Treaty in respect of the upcoming Review Conference and the work of the Conference on Disarmament in particular.

The President: I thank the representative of Malaysia for his statement and for his kind words for the presidency. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Peru.

Ms. Alfaro Espinosa (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to begin by congratulating you on assuming the leadership of the Conference on Disarmament and on the resumption of its work. You have been doing an impeccable job, including by holding bilateral and regional consultations. We are convinced that broad and transparent consultations will lay the foundations for a new phase to begin in this Conference. You may count on the full support of the delegation of Peru in making your work a success. I would also like to welcome the new representatives of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia, to wish them well in the performance of their duties in Geneva, and to embrace our dear friend, Ambassador Terhi Hakala of Finland, who will be leaving us. I wish her every success in her future endeavours.

Before continuing, I would like to convey, through you, Mr. President, our appreciation to Ambassador Sally Mansfield and all her team. Despite the international paralysis caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) health crisis, the Australian presidency remained active, proactive and committed. It conducted extensive consultations that yielded the information we heard in the comprehensive statement that Ambassador Mansfield made earlier, and it produced a proposal for technical amendments to make the Conference's rules of procedure gender-neutral – a proposal that certainly has our full support.

Peru welcomes the timely initiative of Austria in convening this general debate to allow us to share our thoughts on the current health crisis and its relationship with the Conference. The COVID-19 pandemic is presenting challenges for health systems and has disrupted the world order. The world was not prepared to face this crisis and is now experiencing a time of uncertainty and manifest human vulnerability. It is a watershed moment.

This crisis has highlighted a reality: the nature and scope of the challenges facing humanity mean that they cannot be addressed by countries acting separately. That is true of pandemics, just as it is of the fight against climate change, of the protection of human rights and democracy, of the regulation of migration, of international trade and of the prosecution of crimes against humanity. It is certainly true of nuclear disarmament.

We are witnessing a decisive moment in human history, in which political will is required to strengthen multilateralism so as to prevent and respond to global problems and challenges as a matter of priority, to ensure the survival of the planet (climate change), the welfare of humanity (the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda) and collective security (the disarmament machinery). These purposes are foreseen in the Charter of the United Nations.

Destiny has chosen us to represent our countries in the Conference, the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, established by the General Assembly in 1978 at its first special session devoted to disarmament. Decidedly, the Conference has played its part in building a better world. The instruments it delivered in the past now form part of the security architecture and enjoy multilateral legitimacy. However, its work has been deadlocked for two decades. We look with concern upon the stalemate in the Conference and upon the status of bilateral treaties that for years limited, reduced and eliminated nuclear weapons, but which have now ceased to exist or whose future is under a shadow of uncertainty. Conflicts are proliferating and new threats to international peace and security are emerging. In many cases they are caused by geopolitical tensions and an arms race in which the temptation to resort to weapons of mass destruction is rekindled by modernization programmes and new security and military doctrines that contemplate their use.

Mr. President, Peru is committed to international law and the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, considering that the intensification of violence and the use of force are not viable or acceptable alternatives for the international community. Peru, which belongs to a region that renounced nuclear weapons in 1967, firmly believes in multilateralism as an instrument for international security, centred on the human person. The possible use of

nuclear weapons gives cause for the utmost concern, since the possibility of their intentional or accidental use represents a global danger whose consequences would be potentially catastrophic and incompatible with international humanitarian law.

We consider that it is crucial to strengthen multilateral processes and institutions, especially the United Nations. My country is convinced of the vital importance of resuming the work of the Conference through sincere dialogue and a genuine political will to fulfil its negotiating mandate in accordance with the rules of procedure.

Unfortunately we have witnessed the pain of thousands of people who have lost family members in the midst of the health, economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19. Let us not ignore the possibility of the much more serious crisis that would ensue from a nuclear explosion, which would endanger the lives of millions of human beings around the world. Let us encourage our capitals to reflect on this, now that the situation allows us to foresee the magnitude of the humanitarian consequences. The international community, civil society, our compatriots and our children are all waiting for the Conference to offer them a ray of hope in the name of international peace and security.

I would like to conclude by recalling the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Peruvian Ambassador Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, a great peacemaker and a tireless negotiator who died on 5 March last. In his 1991 report on the work of the Organization (A/46/1), he pointed out that “The way we treat the new generation of global problems that now confront humanity may very well determine the quality of life for all the peoples living on the planet ... and even their survival.”

The President: I thank Ambassador Alfaro for her statement and for her kind words for the President. I now invite Ambassador Sharma of India to take the floor, to be followed by the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Sharma (India): Mr. President, my delegation congratulates you on your assumption of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You have assumed the presidency at a momentous juncture, when we are resuming work in-person at the Conference amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Given Austria’s well-known commitment to multilateralism as well as to non-proliferation and disarmament and the depth of your diplomatic experience and skills, we are confident that your presidency will make a substantial contribution to the work of the Conference. Let me assure you of my delegation’s fullest cooperation and support in steering our work.

In this context, we recognize the concerted efforts made by the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session. My delegation also avails itself of this opportunity to place on record its appreciation of Ambassador Sally Mansfield of Australia and her team for their contribution as President during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcome and support Australia’s proposal for a technical update to the Conference’s rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral.

We welcome Ambassador Villegas of Argentina, Ambassador Lim Sang-beom of the Republic of Korea and Ambassador Bachtobji of Tunisia as the newest members of our Conference family. India aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Group of 21.

Mr. President, India attaches high importance to the Conference on Disarmament as the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, as has been mandated by the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 74/74. Today’s turbulent global security situation requires the Conference on Disarmament to act with responsibility and alacrity towards discharging its core mandate of negotiating and concluding legally binding instruments.

We are already midway through 2020. While we have not been able to achieve consensus on a programme of work, that inability should not deter us from endeavouring to do so. We have missed the Disarmament Commission session this year. It is therefore even more important that the Conference on Disarmament demonstrate tangible progress. In this

context, India supports a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that would enable the Conference to commence negotiations on all the core issues on its agenda.

India is committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament. Without prejudice to the priority attached to disarmament, India supports the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference of a fissile material cut-off treaty on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein, which remains the most suitable basis for commencement of negotiations, as also endorsed by the Group of Governmental Experts on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices and the high-level fissile material cut-off treaty expert preparatory group. India also supports the commencement of negotiations on a legally binding instrument for the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Mr. President, India appreciates your efforts in resuming in-person plenary meetings at the Conference with the possibility of remote participation. My delegation understands that, given the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, our priority is the health and well-being of all delegates and United Nations staff. At this juncture, while the Conference resumes work with temporary working and technical arrangements, India would like to underline the necessity of upholding the Conference's rules of procedure and its negotiating mandate.

As rightly predicted, Pakistan has once again made an attempt to present baseless fabrications and resurrect some of the old and discredited ideas and proposals. This is not new, as Pakistan has made it an obsession and a habit to abuse every single forum, including the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee and the General Assembly. Fortunately, the world sees through its lies and deceit every time. Pakistan has lost its credibility as a member of the Conference on Disarmament by repeatedly misusing it as a platform for malicious propaganda. Our position on these issues is well known and needs no reiteration. India's security concerns are not confined to a region, and therefore India has always approached these issues in a global context.

Pakistan has also made a number of baseless and unsubstantiated allegations against India, including in relation to the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, allegations which do not even deserve a response, as they pertain to matters internal to India. As a responsible State, India strictly abides by its obligations under international treaties and needs no lessons from a country which has no credibility whatsoever. But what else can one expect from a country that uses terrorism as an instrument of its State policy and has distinguished itself as the greatest haven for international and national terrorists?

It would have been better if this country had refrained from making comments on issues that are extraneous to the work of the Conference on Disarmament. But old habits die hard. The Conference is not the forum for bilateral or regional issues, as its mandate is to focus on agreements of global application. As India has made clear several times, it is opposed to the consideration of regional security issues in the Conference on Disarmament. India's commitment to promoting and maintaining global peace and international security is widely recognized. As such, I do not need to respond to the baseless remarks by Pakistan. At a time when we were looking forward to resuming the work of this Conference, the statement by Pakistan can only be viewed as unhelpful. This Conference will recall from its proceedings how this one country has been the biggest roadblock to negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty on every occasion, including in 2009, when the Conference had even arrived at a consensus programme of work.

We once again urge the Pakistani delegation to avoid bringing up extraneous issues designed to create obstacles to getting down to serious and substantive work in the Conference. In fact, we would like to call upon this country to act with responsibility. It must demonstrate that responsibility while working towards consensus on a programme of work that would allow the commencement of substantive work in the Conference at an early date, including the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty, rather than wasting our precious time on its machinations.

Mr. President, since I have already said what I need to say, I will not take the floor again and spend any more time on this issue out of respect for you, for the work of the Conference and for all our colleagues here. India is committed to multilateralism and supports efforts by the Conference towards building mutual trust and understanding. We are ready to work with member States towards the fulfilment of the Conference's core mandate of negotiating legally binding instruments that would strengthen international peace and security

The President: I thank Ambassador Sharma for his statement and for his kind words for me. I will now give the floor to the delegate of Algeria. If time allows, the following speaker will be the Ambassador of Tunisia.

Mr. Berkat (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and express my sincere thanks to your predecessor, the Ambassador of Australia, and members of her delegation for the efforts made during her presidency of the Conference. I also wish to welcome the new ambassadors of Tunisia, Argentina and the Republic of Korea.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Egypt on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. President, my delegation would like to express its full support and appreciation for your positive and gradual approach within the framework of the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, which has allowed us today to resume the work of the Conference and to meet our colleagues and members of the Secretariat again in good health after the exceptional situation resulting from the global health crisis associated with the new coronavirus. In the face of these difficult circumstances that have affected every country in the world, we cannot fail to remember the victims of the pandemic and to express gratitude to all those who are working on the front lines to respond to it.

Mr. President, the current challenges posed by this crisis and its unprecedented effects at all levels are a cause for reflection. We should draw lessons from this situation, particularly with regard to the common fate of humanity and the security of societies in its broadest sense. In these exceptional circumstances, the commemoration of the International Day of Living Together in Peace on 16 May was an opportunity to reflect on the repercussions of the crisis and to take a moment to recall the importance of the bonds that unite peoples. This ordeal that has afflicted humankind has clearly demonstrated that international cooperation is imperative in overcoming crises. It has also highlighted the need for us to stand together in order to prevent potential threats in the future and thus spare humanity more suffering and misfortune. The continued existence of nuclear weapons represents the greatest threat of all to the human race. Therefore, through this Conference, we must all strive to contribute to the noble goals that unite humanity by working within the framework of the Conference's negotiating mandate to develop legal instruments that will spare humanity the dire consequences that continue to plague us and pose a permanent threat to humanity.

Mr. President, in order to meet the ultimate challenge of ridding all of humanity of the spectre of an insecure and uncertain future, it is necessary at this crucial time to reaffirm the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, and to express our determination to promote multilateralism as a fundamental principle of negotiations in these areas. In the context of the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, I would like to emphasize the commitment of Algeria to contributing to joint efforts to establish stability, prosperity and a safer world for all through a multilateral system governed by noble values and the objectives and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. President, the collective efforts of the six Presidents of the current session have sent a positive message concerning the importance of collective action to enable the Conference to achieve tangible results and restore its role as the sole forum for negotiations in the field of disarmament. In this context, my country, having assumed the presidency of the Conference at the beginning of this session, appreciates the effectiveness and importance of the collective, participatory and substantive approach, and the priority given to the

language of consultation, dialogue and building trust, which has led to coherent efforts by member States, laid a new building block in the search for consensus and achieved a considerable degree of trust and a positive atmosphere. From this standpoint, my delegation remains fully prepared to participate constructively in pursuing the collective way forward that was discussed within the framework of the group of the six Presidents of the 2020 session, together with the last President of the 2019 session and the first of the 2021 session, and at the same time to engage in an incremental, optimistic and objective approach in order to secure positive results for our collective work in the future that will serve our Conference and preserve its credibility and effectiveness.

Finally, I would like to reiterate to you, Mr. President, and to the members of your delegation, the appreciation and full support of my delegation for your valuable efforts. I also wish to express our full readiness to work with the future presidents to advance the work of our Conference.

The President: I thank the representative of Algeria for his statement and his kind words and now give the floor to Ambassador Izquierdo Miño of Ecuador.

Mr. Izquierdo Miño (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*) (*spoke via video link*): Thank you very much, Mr. President. On behalf of the delegation of Ecuador I would like to express my warmest congratulations to you, Ambassador Robert Müller, on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at such a delicate and difficult time, especially for this forum, which faces a challenge in fulfilling its responsibilities for the collective good of humanity. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ambassador of Australia for all her efforts and work during the third presidency of 2020, notably her decision to move forward with direct consultations at all possible levels, as was fully reflected in her excellent statement this morning. We thank her for her statement and take note of its content as food for thought. I welcome the involvement of the new Permanent Representatives of Argentina, the Republic of Korea and Tunisia in the work of the Conference.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has taken all countries by surprise, without distinction. It has had and will continue to have devastating health and economic consequences for all our populations, and especially for the poorest and most vulnerable. These consequences have merely confirmed what my delegation stated at the beginning of the year, in this very forum, about the stupefaction induced by an attitude that most concerns itself with domination and power, investing immense amounts of economic resources in accumulating and perfecting weapons, while the health systems in all our countries have serious frailties and billions of people face a daily struggle just to survive. The pandemic reminds us every day of the vital importance of multilateralism and the ineluctable need for global solidarity and cooperation in the collective interest of the international community as a whole. In this regard, my delegation is very concerned that the crisis caused by the pandemic has not created an immediate awareness of the urgent need to effectively strengthen multilateralism. Moreover, it is apparent that there are difficulties in achieving the ideal of international cooperation, in finding a prospect of harmony and peace, and in relation to a diplomatic community that seems to lack the will to engage in dialogue and negotiations in some forums.

Ecuador was one of the countries that submitted a statement of support for the appeal by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic; a statement that was reiterated on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. Yet despite the need for measures to reduce global tensions, these have been deepening. The global nuclear arms control system and dialogues on non-proliferation and disarmament are in a critical situation. The 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has had to be postponed, while its expected outcomes have led some to cast doubt on the implementation of previous commitments. No progress has been made in respect of the bilateral and plurilateral treaties between the nuclear-weapon States; indeed, several of them have been terminated.

We believe that this scenario can be described as confirming an absence of trust, which many leaders are unable to build or are unwilling to exercise in international relations. This lack of trust is leading the world down a blind alley with a highly dangerous fragility on

all sides. In this context, Ecuador, faithful to its commitment to peace and convinced of the capacity of multilateralism to achieve the goals of peace and security, reaffirms its willingness to work until the Conference on Disarmament assumes its responsibility and fulfils its mandate to negotiate legally binding disarmament instruments. My delegation believes that small countries with little military or economic power have the right to demand our security, to jointly pursue the strengthening of multilateralism and to aspire to a peace that is only possible in a world free of weapons of mass destruction. Our status as active members of the international community, as constituted in the institutions of the United Nations, assures us of this right.

Mr. President, as has been stated in the past, my country has worked to promote multilateralism as the principal means of guaranteeing peace and security in the world, and therefore as the basic mechanism for promoting disarmament and non-proliferation and for seeking an effective international agreement that provides non-nuclear-weapon States with assurances against the use or threat of use of these weapons. In recent decades, Ecuador has maintained its commitment to peace, disarmament and non-proliferation by actively participating in the Conference and in the negotiation of instruments prohibiting weapons of mass destruction and regulating conventional weapons. In 1999, it was an Ecuadorian diplomat that chaired the working group of the United Nations Disarmament Commission that reached a consensus on the principles and guidelines for the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. Consequently, we recognize the importance of the opinions of member countries of nuclear-weapon-free zones – both those that have been established and those which are being set up – when it comes to identifying the most suitable pathways by which the international community can negotiate effective general and complete disarmament.

And in conclusion, Mr President, we reiterate our willingness to actively cooperate with your presidency.

The President: I thank Ambassador Izquierdo Miño for his statement and his kind words. The interpreters have been so kind as to accord us a few extra minutes, and I have one more speaker for this meeting: Ambassador Bachtobji of Tunisia.

Mr. Bachtobji (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Thank you, Mr. President. Ambassador Müller, President of the Conference on Disarmament, distinguished colleagues, allow me to extend my thanks to you for your kind words of welcome to me on joining the Conference. I congratulate you once again, Mr. President, on assuming the rotating presidency of the Conference, and I assure you of the full cooperation of my country's delegation in order to advance in your work. I also pay tribute to the commendable efforts made by the previous Presidents of this session towards achieving our common goal. Let me assure you, dear colleagues, of the commitment of Tunisia, as one of the member States of the Conference, to working together to revive its role and resume its substantive work, in accordance with the mandate set for it by the first special session of the United Nations General Assembly on disarmament as the single multilateral space for disarmament negotiations.

In this context, Tunisia, as a member of the Security Council for this year and next year, called for an immediate global ceasefire within the scope of mobilizing and uniting international efforts to combat the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has once again highlighted the need for the greatest possible level of cooperation and solidarity. Multilateral action provides the only guarantee for meeting these universal challenges that transcend borders and countries. It is essential that our Conference should work to break the deadlock through a greater focus on coordination and reconciling different points of views, based on realism, transparency and the identification of priorities, as long as our collective goal is to achieve peace and security in the world and to stop the alarming ongoing arms race at a time when humanity is facing new and extremely dangerous challenges that threaten its very existence and continuity. Tunisia will remain committed to this collective effort with the aim of adopting a comprehensive and balanced programme of work for the Conference capable of advancing our work and quickly arriving at the stage of serious negotiations to curb the arms race.

The President: I thank Ambassador Bachtobji for his statement and the kind words for me. We have about 15 speakers remaining on the list. I therefore propose that we adjourn the meeting now and exhaust the list in front of me at the plenary meeting this afternoon. That meeting will take place today at 3 p.m. both in this room and on a remote platform, so I would ask the delegations to come back to the room or connect to the platform a few minutes early to ensure that we start on time.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.