
Conference on Disarmament

English

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

Held via videoconference on Monday, 22 February 2021, at 3 p.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Gonçalo de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão..... (Brazil)



The President: Distinguished delegates, we will now continue with the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. As I indicated this morning, I intend to take all statements in right of reply to the addresses of the dignitaries, if any, at the end of the high-level segment.

We will begin with an address by Mr. Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State of the United States of America.

Mr. Blinken (United States of America): Distinguished representatives, this body has a responsibility to create new tools to address twenty-first-century threats and to protect what we have built together. President Biden has made it clear: the United States has a national security imperative and a moral responsibility to reduce and eventually eliminate the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. For decades, President Biden has worked to protect and advance the international arms control and non-proliferation architecture – and the institutions that underpin it – by shepherding treaties through the Senate, engaging in diplomacy and advocating for risk reduction measures.

Just two weeks after he took office as President, the United States and the Russian Federation extended the New START for five years. That decision made our countries and the world safer, and it was only the beginning of our efforts to address nuclear threats.

The United States is ready to engage with Russia in strategic stability discussions on arms control and emerging security issues. We will be clear-eyed about the broader challenges posed by Russia and how our respective nuclear arsenals represent existential threats to each other.

Working with our allies and partners, the United States will also demand greater transparency regarding provocative and dangerous weapons development programmes of China and continue efforts aimed at reducing the dangers posed by its nuclear arsenal.

Further, we want to engage all countries, including Russia and China, on developing standards and norms of responsible behaviour in outer space. The Conference on Disarmament has already held discussions on space security and is uniquely positioned to help lead that work. I urge States that are developing anti-satellite weapons to refrain from dangerous testing of such systems. For example, contrary to its diplomatic and public stance against the weaponization of space, Russia conducted a ground-based anti-satellite test in December 2020. We should be reducing tensions in outer space, not making them worse.

The United States remains committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. Diplomacy is the best path to achieve that goal. President Biden has said that if Iran comes back into strict compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the United States is prepared to do the same. Working with allies and partners, we will also seek to lengthen and strengthen the Plan and address other areas of concern, including the destabilizing regional behaviour of Iran and its ballistic missile development and proliferation. And Iran must comply with its safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency and its international obligations.

The United States also remains focused on the denuclearization of North Korea and will work closely with allies and partners to address that country's illicit weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes.

Mr. President, our predecessors worked together, despite their differences. They understood that threats posed by weapons of mass destruction are not limited by national boundaries. And so they negotiated landmark treaties that guard against the worst impulses of human nature.

One such treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, has been the paragon of verifiable arms control and disarmament agreements. It is now under duress. Syria has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own people and failed to cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to fully disclose its chemical weapons programme and verifiably destroy its chemical weapons stock. Russia has provided Syria with diplomatic and military assistance to continue this destructive behaviour. And Russia has used chemical weapons to try to assassinate its own citizens, including opposition leader Alexei Navalny last summer and former intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter

Yulia in March of 2018. That attack happened in the United Kingdom, and British civilians were killed and injured. We condemn such actions and call on Russia and Syria to comply with their obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. There can be no impunity. We must preserve international law against the use of chemical weapons or we risk normalizing their use.

We must also refocus on reducing the threat of disease and biological agents as weapons. We urge countries to begin work now towards a constructive outcome as we prepare for the upcoming review conference of the Biological Weapons Convention.

Last year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons entering into force. The Treaty's near universality is an achievement we should all celebrate. The United States is committed to advancing the non-proliferation and disarmament goals of the Treaty, as well as increasing cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We look forward to the Treaty's tenth Review Conference and will do our part to make it a success.

Mr. President, we must move beyond our differences to address shared threats. As a first step, it is finally time to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. And of course, there is so much more than that to do. If we idle and ignore our mandate, we fail the people of all our countries and our children. I pledge that the United States is here to work, cooperate and once again use the Conference on Disarmament to create bold, innovative agreements to protect ourselves and each other. We hope you will be our partner in these efforts.

The President: I thank the Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, of the United States of America. I now give the floor to Mr. Marc Garneau, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Mr. Garneau (Canada): Distinguished colleagues, it is a real honour to join you today for this important discussion. One of my country's key priorities is upholding the rules-based international order that continues to guide our engagements and efforts towards more peace and security. More than 70 years ago, leaders started building the framework that has allowed us to cooperate and make progress in countless fields. Today, it is our turn and our great responsibility to continue building, improving and modernizing that framework.

Unfortunately, we are seeing worrying trends with potentially devastating consequences: increased tensions are fanning differences between States; inflexible national positions make compromise more difficult; and more States are moving away from multilateral measures when it comes to national security. However, we all know that States can best safeguard their security by fully engaging with their regions and the rest of the world. Multilateral arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament measures offer us a path to lasting peace and security.

The Conference on Disarmament has a special role to play in achieving a more peaceful and secure world. But, to fulfil this role and its potential, members must re-engage and strive to come up with a cohesive plan. We must show flexibility in restoring the Conference's negotiating mandate. Canada is committed to working side-by-side with the other Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference towards that goal.

A critical step should be the launching of negotiations for a treaty on fissile materials, and our political will is key if we want to be successful in that endeavour. The groundwork for the negotiations has been laid, and the final product, including the key question of whether this will be a cut-off treaty, will be determined through negotiations.

On nuclear non-proliferation, Canada has embraced cross-regional groups as a way to strengthen implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament have together led to practical recommendations to advance all three pillars of the Treaty at its upcoming Review Conference.

Other weapons of mass destruction remain a concern to Canada. The Syrian Arab Republic has most recently been identified as having used chemical weapons in March 2017. We reiterate our message that Syria must enter into compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and that perpetrators must be held accountable.

Also troubling is the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny in Russia with a Novichok nerve agent. We seek clarity from the Russian authorities on what transpired and we demand that those responsible be brought to justice.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored the importance of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. Infectious diseases have a unique ability to paralyse the planet and cause unparalleled, whole-of-society impacts. We must continue to guard against biological threats and improve the functioning of the Convention.

Outer space security is another important area for the Conference to address. That includes consideration of an agreement to ban anti-satellite weapons tests that produce space debris.

(spoke in French)

Finally, Canada is concerned by advances in artificial intelligence technology and automation. These are changing the nature of warfare and spurring concern about the future deployment of autonomous weapons systems. We believe that such systems must have appropriate human involvement and that the development or use of fully autonomous weapons systems is unacceptable.

These are the key disarmament priorities of Canada, and they are supported by more than mere words. The Weapons Threat Reduction Program is our flagship contribution to the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. Through it, we have delivered more than Can\$ 1.5 billion to support projects around the world. These projects combat the threats posed by chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and support the implementation of the conventional weapon agreements.

Of course, ensuring peace and international security is not the responsibility of any one State, nor can any one State guarantee it. This is a collective enterprise – one in all our interests – and it requires purpose, patience and persistence. This ought to be our shared goal, given the rewards of success. The existential stakes could not be higher: not just individual human lives but our very survival on this planet. But we have not yet seen a sharpening of political will equal to what is at risk. Canada will continue to dedicate itself to negotiated multilateral solutions in the Conference on Disarmament and elsewhere.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada. The Conference will now hear an address by Mr. Alexander Schallenberg, the Austrian Foreign Minister.

Mr. Schallenberg (Austria): Mr. President, the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of our societies and the fragility of humankind. And this pandemic is far from over. It overshadows other crises and conflicts around the world.

The Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists recently reminded us that the existential threats of nuclear weapons have intensified in recent years. The Clock now stands at 100 seconds to midnight. We have no time to lose. The danger posed by these hideous weapons has not diminished since the end of the cold war. On the contrary, the risks are actually increasing as arsenals are being modernized and new delivery systems are being developed. A new nuclear arms race is actually unfolding in front of our eyes and we cannot stand idly by and do nothing. We must eliminate nuclear weapons, before they eliminate us.

The entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is a historic milestone for disarmament and a big step forward towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Austria is looking forward to the first meeting of States parties to the Treaty in Vienna within a year.

But we also need to strengthen other cornerstones of the disarmament architecture: by ensuring that States fulfil their obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; by encouraging more ratifications of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; and by broadening the scope of the New START.

We welcome the extension of the New START for five years by the United States and Russia as an important signal. Let us use the time to make additional steps – Austria stands ready to host further strategic talks.

Our duty to our citizens is not only to deal with the crises of today. We have to prepare for the challenges of tomorrow and to ensure a peaceful future for many generations to come. Rapid technological advances raise fundamental legal, moral and security questions and none more so than lethal autonomous weapons systems. This is not science fiction. It is fast becoming a reality – a reality that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has rightly called both “politically unacceptable and morally repugnant”. We cannot allow an algorithm to decide who lives and who dies. We must ensure that weapons systems without meaningful human control are banned under international law. With this aim in mind, Austria will host an international conference on this issue this autumn. I invite all of you to join us in Vienna.

Another long-standing priority for Austria is the protection of civilians in urban warfare. I welcome the resumption of negotiations on a political declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas.

We have seen prosperous cities razed down to the ground, hospitals destroyed and schools reduced to rubble. The tragedies on the battlefields of Syria, Yemen and Libya painfully demonstrate the need to protect civilians, now more than ever. Let us take a stand together and show that respecting international humanitarian law is not a choice but a duty.

Mr. President, I deeply regret that disputes over who can participate as observer at the Conference on Disarmament have overshadowed the beginning of this session. This goes against the very spirit of multilateralism. Everyone should have a seat at the table and the right to have their voices heard.

And I strongly deplore the fact that we are still facing a deadlock that prevents us from having effective negotiations within this Conference. It has been 25 years since the last meaningful outcome – the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We cannot allow it to become 26.

Distinguished colleagues, we will not achieve progress in the blink of an eye. We must show both courageous leadership and persistence. But, given the existential threat to humanity, it is our humanitarian and moral imperative to do so.

The President: I thank Mr. Alexander Schallenberg, Foreign Minister of Austria. We will now hear a statement by Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The international stage is becoming increasingly dangerous and challenging. More than ever, human survival itself is at risk. International peace and security are threatened by conflicts, predatory and unconventional wars, acts of aggression, attempts to bring about regime change and an arms race that squanders enormous resources that are indispensable for the sustainable development of populations.

The multiple crises generated by the devastating coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have highlighted the fragility of a world in which universal access to basic health services is not guaranteed, but nuclear arsenals are being modernized and expanded and are playing an increasingly important role in defence and security doctrines that continue to threaten humanity.

It is essential to strengthen multilateralism and ensure that the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law are fully respected. If nations are to coexist peacefully, Governments must stop putting pressure on each other and stop engaging in unjust unilateral coercive measures. On 11 January 2021, in a cynical and hypocritical act, President Donald Trump’s Government designated Cuba as a State sponsor of terrorism, further hindering any prospect of improvement in bilateral relations between the two countries. We urge the new Government to overturn this absurd and unjustified decision.

This forum must urgently fulfil its mandate to negotiate multilateral disarmament treaties and give priority attention to nuclear disarmament. It is essential to maintain disarmament and arms control agreements. We welcome the fact that Russia and the United States have extended the New START agreement.

We also welcome the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is a real milestone in international efforts to rid the world of such weapons.

Cuba is proud to have been the fifth country to ratify it. I am also pleased to announce that, on 4 February, we deposited the instrument of ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We reiterate that the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by the Heads of State and Government of the entire region, is fully in force. A world of justice, dignity and peace is possible if States continue to cooperate and if international law and the rights of peoples to peace, development and justice are upheld.

In the words of the Commander-in-Chief of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro Ruz, which are still valid today: "Cease the philosophy of dispossession and the philosophy of war will cease".

The President: I thank Mr. Rodríguez Parilla of Cuba. And now the Conference will hear an address from Mr. Fuad Hussein, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq.

Mr. Hussein (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I am pleased to join you in this international multilateral forum to confirm the importance that the Republic of Iraq attaches to the Conference on Disarmament and its commitment to the ideals of multilateralism that enhance the credibility of the collective responsibility of the international community in its efforts to achieve the goal of general and complete disarmament.

Mr. President, the role of the Conference on Disarmament is growing ever more important at this sensitive juncture in the light of the rise in regional crises and political tensions in the international environment, as well as the fundamental challenge facing the world as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its repercussions in various areas, all of which reaffirm the importance of concerted efforts in the face of common challenges and threats.

The Conference retains its importance as the only international negotiating forum for disarmament, although it has not been able to exercise its negotiating mandate on disarmament treaties for more than two decades. In this context, Iraq welcomes all initiatives and activities aimed at enabling the Conference to resume the exercise of the mandate entrusted to it; it also welcomes the spirit of cooperation among the six Presidents of this year's session and their determined efforts to reach an agreement to adopt a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that meets the concerns of all member States.

We also welcome your initiative to continue the discussions by building on the package for a draft programme of work presented by our sister republic, Algeria, during its presidency of the Conference in 2020. At the same time, we wish to emphasize that the real problem hindering the work of the Conference is a lack of political will on the part of States. We need to search for ways to achieve consensus on substantive issues and avoid the politicization and political tensions that undermine the chances of moving the Conference out of the stalemate it has faced for more than 20 years.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament has suffered from the continuing impasse, which has led to many disarmament issues being addressed outside the framework of the Conference because member States have stuck to their positions and failed to show the necessary flexibility, hindering any progress in this area. All member States therefore need to make a serious effort to allow the Conference to return to its proper role.

Iraq shares the view of many States that nuclear disarmament should remain a top priority for the Conference, in line with the special status accorded to it in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held in 1978, and the conclusions of the International Court of Justice in its 1996 advisory opinion concerning the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

I would like to clarify the position of Iraq concerning the main issues on the agenda of the Conference and, in particular, the four items related to the programme of work.

First, on nuclear disarmament: the technological advances in this field will increase the risk of nuclear weapons persisting. Iraq therefore supports all efforts and negotiations among the nuclear-weapon States to achieve a serious reduction in nuclear weapons and

eventually a world free of nuclear weapons. Iraq also welcomes the recent agreement between Russia and the United States of America to extend the New START for an additional five years, as this will contribute to further regional and global calm and stability, although it is certainly not a substitute for the Conference's fundamental objective of general nuclear disarmament. Iraq calls on all the remaining States listed in annex 2 of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to take the necessary measures and follow the procedures to sign and ratify the Treaty.

Second, with regard to negative security assurances, there must be agreement on the need for a binding international legal instrument, whereby the nuclear-weapon States would give unconditional assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. Although negative security assurances are one response to the legitimate and fair demands of non-nuclear-weapon States – which have chosen, voluntarily, to relinquish all nuclear military options upon becoming parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – they should not be considered an alternative to the ultimate goal of complete nuclear disarmament.

Third, as the continued production of fissile material poses an obstacle to achieving the objectives of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, Iraq supports the idea of granting the Conference a mandate to negotiate an effective, non-discriminatory and internationally applicable multilateral treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Fourth, Iraq shares the view of other member States that outer space is a common heritage of humankind and should be explored for peaceful purposes only. Its militarization would lead to a costly and destructive arms race that must be prevented. The Conference on Disarmament should consider the issue of adopting a binding international instrument to prevent the weaponization of outer space. We reiterate our support for any international initiatives aimed at promoting the peaceful and equitable use of outer space.

Mr. President, achieving the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons requires the establishment of zones free of this type of lethal weapon in all parts of the world as an important step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. We therefore call upon the international community to implement the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), in accordance with the action plan contained in the Final Document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

In this context, Iraq welcomed the organization, in 2019, the results and the outputs of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. Iraq considers that the Conference marked an important step towards achieving the goal of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and reinforces other parallel efforts aimed at establishing such a zone. We would like to emphasize the need for continued joint efforts to ensure constructive and effective participation in the NPT Review Conference scheduled for next August.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the Presidents of the Conference this year to allow the Conference on Disarmament to resume its true role in addressing disarmament and non-proliferation issues. You may count on the support of the Republic of Iraq for your projects and we wish you and the other presidents success in your work.

The President: I thank Mr. Fuad Hussein, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq. We will now hear a statement from Mr. Felipe Carlos Solá, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina.

Mr. Solá (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Over the past year, the particularities of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have drawn further attention to the general weakening of multilateralism. For this reason, it is important to resume the work that we have not yet been able to complete within the framework of this Conference, which is the international community's sole forum for negotiations on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

We must take steps to prevent an arms race in outer space and to ensure the sovereign right to participate in the exploration and use of space for exclusively peaceful purposes. This year we will also have to continue negotiations in connection with the Ninth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention and the Sixth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. In the area of conventional weapons, Argentina recently chaired the Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty and the group of governmental experts to carry out a study on ways and means of promoting transparency in international transfers of conventional arms.

Fifty years after the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, we are concerned to note that, while significant progress has been made in the area of non-proliferation, no equivalent progress has been made in the area of nuclear disarmament. We believe that we will be able to address this issue productively only if the nuclear-weapon States demonstrate their willingness to move towards the elimination of such weapons. The legally binding disarmament obligations contained in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are quite clear. This treaty, together with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which has entered into force, and the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, which is being negotiated, lay the groundwork for the future and total elimination of nuclear weapons. These three treaties would rid the world of such weapons.

We are confident that the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will serve to strengthen and renew our commitment to the Treaty and encourage us to take concrete steps in this direction.

As Argentina is a country that makes significant use of nuclear materials for peaceful purposes, it is important for us to have a forum for discussing and negotiating issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of one of the key milestones in the area of peace and security in Latin America: the establishment of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials. The Agency's experience in the area of verification and mutual trust-building shows that there are valid alternatives for other regions where mistrust persists. The Agency serves as an example. Latin America is a peaceful region and that peace has been strengthened by the signing of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established one of the first nuclear-weapon-free zones in the world. However, we are still faced with the fact that interpretative declarations made by nuclear-weapon States when they acceded to the Protocols to the Treaty, especially the second Protocol, are still in force. In this regard, my country recently denounced the entry of nuclear submarines into the South Atlantic, which is a zone of peace.

Those of us who have renounced nuclear weapons and denuclearized our region cannot be subject to the whims of those who possess them. For this reason, we call on those States that still believe that nuclear weapons have a major role to play at the global level to make the necessary effort to guarantee that such weapons will not be used to attack or threaten us.

The global security situation shows that there is much still to be accomplished in this area. My country, Argentina, is convinced that this forum can and must continue to make a substantive contribution so that we may aspire to a safer world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Felipe Carlos Solá, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina, and I give the floor to Mr. Andrés Allamand, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile.

Mr. Allamand (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, allow me to reiterate to you and the delegations of the member States that Chile is firmly committed to international disarmament efforts within the framework of the United Nations and to the Agenda for Disarmament presented by the Secretary-General in 2018.

In the course of the year now starting, Chile aims to use its position as one of the six Presidents of this session – we will serve as President of the Conference in August and September – to contribute to the search for consensus that will revitalize the disarmament agenda and allow progress to be made on the necessary agreements, always bearing in mind

the humanitarian dimension of disarmament, which concerns people's security. Chile considers it essential that the Conference should contribute to the strengthening of the three pillars of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, namely, non-proliferation, the peaceful use of nuclear energy and, in particular, disarmament. We also consider it necessary to initiate an in-depth discussion on a number of current challenges to security agendas that have had a demonstrable impact on our values, way of life and coexistence. These include digital technology, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and the use of outer space for military purposes.

Chile therefore supports the negotiation of a non-discriminatory, multilateral and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

My country maintains its unwavering support for this Conference and the objectives that Chile pursues as a State party to the treaties negotiated in this forum, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative, the De-Alerting Group and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, in connection with which monitoring stations throughout Chile play a crucial role in maintaining world peace and security. The lack of norms to prevent sensitive technology from ending up in countries that are seeking to develop weapons of mass destruction, in open violation of these resolutions, is one of the main obstacles facing multilateral disarmament efforts.

This new part of our session reflects our refusal to be overcome by the circumstances and complications arising from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the instability facing the multilateral system. We reaffirm that international dialogue is the best mechanism for moving towards a safer and more peaceful world for the coming generations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Andrés Allamand, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chile, and I now give the floor to Mr. Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, Ambassador and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador.

Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address you today as Minister for Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility of Ecuador within the framework of the 2021 session of the Conference on Disarmament. I hold the Conference in particularly high esteem as I have represented my country in this forum on three occasions as Permanent Representative. In 1999, I participated in the negotiations on the latest enlargement of the membership of the Conference, which allowed Ecuador, among other countries, to become a member.

I chaired the Conference in early 2012 and co-chaired, with Australia, the working group established to reach consensus on the programme of work in 2014. I also participated in the work of the five subsidiary bodies in 2018. I am therefore well aware of the difficulties that this body has faced in recent years in its efforts to adopt a programme of work. There can be no doubt as to the Conference's importance. In the days of its predecessors, and for the first 20 years of its existence, this forum was highly successful in negotiating legally binding agreements of crucial importance in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Therefore, its failure to produce results or overcome the impasse in which it has been mired for more than two decades is incomprehensible and has seriously harmed its standing as an institution. Without real political will to move forward in the areas of non-proliferation and disarmament, and without firm trust in multilateralism and the ability to find agreements in this forum, every resource and every effort will be in vain.

On the other hand, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has clearly highlighted the costliness and absurdity of postponing decisions on disarmament and continuing to spend billions of dollars per year on maintaining and improving military hardware while health systems, including in the most powerful countries, collapse because they are unprepared and lack the resources needed to provide an adequate response. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the world spent \$1.917 trillion on armaments, or 2.2 per cent of the global gross domestic product, in 2019 alone, which is 3.6 per cent more than in 2018 and 7.2 per cent more than in 2010. By contrast, the

Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 launched by the Secretary-General initially sought \$2 billion to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. An additional \$4.7 billion was then requested for COVID-19 humanitarian response efforts and the number of beneficiary countries was increased from 54 to 63, bringing the total amount sought to \$6.7 billion. It is clear that the world must rethink this imbalance in its priorities and drastically reduce its spending on armaments in order to redirect these resources to health, education, food and combating poverty and climate change. Against this backdrop, if we want the Conference to remain the most important multilateral disarmament forum, it is essential to take action and demonstrate concrete results. This year could present us with a unique opportunity to do so.

The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons marks a turning point in nuclear disarmament efforts and in international law. In this regard, we welcome its entry into force on 22 January, at a crucial moment for humanity. It is an instrument that not only complements the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but is also fully compliant with that Treaty's article VI and therefore promotes its effective implementation. We invite all those countries that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

We welcome the recent announcement by the United States of America and the Russian Federation concerning the extension of the New START, which represents a positive sign amid the debacle of the arms control architecture in recent years. We hope that these renewed commitments by both parties will be accompanied by new efforts to promote disarmament. This year – 2021 – could turn out to be better. Crucial meetings lie ahead of us, including the Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, at which Ecuador hopes that it will be possible to reiterate and strengthen the commitments undertaken previously. The Review Conference of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Convention on Cluster Munitions will also be taking place. It would be an ideal opportunity for the Conference on Disarmament to participate in these events and be part of a renewed multilateral effort to promote non-proliferation and disarmament. For its part, Ecuador reiterates that it is willing and able to contribute to this goal and calls on all members to show flexibility and the necessary political will so that we can finally adopt a programme of work for the Conference.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Luis Gallegos Chiriboga, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, and I now give the floor to Ms. Arancha González Laya, Minister for Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation of Spain.

Ms. González Laya (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, Spain has adopted a new foreign affairs strategy that is committed to more effective multilateralism. Within this strategy, we wish to promote the various disarmament regimes, which are an essential part of multilateralism and which, in many cases, are currently subject to significant tensions and deadlocks. This year, three important events are taking place in the disarmament calendar.

First, the Review Conference of the Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The Treaty has played a key role in promoting disarmament and non-proliferation and, despite the delays caused by the pandemic, we are celebrating its fiftieth anniversary and the twenty-fifth anniversary of its indefinite extension. We must reaffirm its validity, promote its role and, above all, put it into practice. The recent extension of the New START by the United States and Russia should give rise to optimism but not complacency. The NPT Review Conference must achieve tangible results. For this reason, Spain is one of the 16 countries that are participating in the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, which was launched in 2019 to promote the success of the Review Conference. It is necessary to restore trust and seek a forum for cooperation. To this end, we are proposing 22 realistic, practical and applicable measures for making progress in this area. I invite all countries to align themselves with the working paper on the “stepping stones” approach, as we consider it to be an important contribution to the Review Conference.

Secondly, the Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention will be taking place. On the one hand, we are going through a pandemic caused by a virus that has highlighted our enormous vulnerabilities. On the other, the use of chemical weapons in recent years has shown that risks remain, regardless of how much progress is made in eradicating

particular weapons. That is why the role of the Biological Weapons Convention must be established more firmly. Without disregarding other options, Spain considers that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons sets an excellent example to follow.

Thirdly, Geneva will be hosting a new Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which is a fundamental pillar of international humanitarian law that Spain has played an active role in developing. We would like to move towards the universal adoption of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and make progress in discussions on lethal autonomous weapon systems in order to arrive at some form of regulation. Together with our partners in the European Union, we have begun to consider the question of new technologies and the necessary regulation of their possible military uses. We hope to be able to contribute to the global debate within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

In recent years, we have seen how this Conference, which is the main driving force for disarmament and the only established negotiating forum, has been deadlocked. The Conference must live up to its mandate and create a space of trust in which we can work on the substantive issues. Spain is leading by example and is therefore offering its support for the proposal of the six Presidents of this year's session.

A key priority for this forum is the fissile material cut-off treaty, which we must reach an agreement on and adopt. The treaty will make a decisive contribution to the fight against nuclear proliferation and nuclear rearmament.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to a cross-cutting vision that must be strengthened: the need to link disarmament measures to the Sustainable Development Goals. Spain embraces this vision and is seeking to take practical steps and implement programmes to limit the devastating impact on civilians of improvised explosive devices and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Spain has an international demining centre with an excellent, long-standing reputation. It also hosts the Counter Improvised Explosive Devices Centre of Excellence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and participates in multiple programmes aimed at combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. We hope that this year's United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects will enable us to make further progress in this area.

I would like to conclude by calling on all of us to make a greater commitment to disarmament. In an increasingly competitive world, this is essential to reducing the risk of conflict. These diplomatic efforts are essential to creating a safer world. We can spare neither energy nor political will.

The President: I thank Ms. Arancha González Laya, Minister for Foreign Affairs, the European Union and Cooperation of Spain and I now give the floor to Dato Kamarudin Jaffar, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

Mr. Jaffar (Malaysia): Mr. President, our delegation deeply appreciates the efforts that you and your predecessor have made thus far in advancing the work of the Conference. I assure you of my country's cooperation and support for the Presidency and all constructive initiatives towards a successful outcome of this year's session.

The year 2020 was a devastatingly challenging year for all of us. Some have described 2020 as a year of profound tragedy, others as a year of uncertainty and limbo. Irrespective of how we regard the year 2020, let us hope that this year will be a better year, a year when we return to productivity and a greater sense of normality.

The fact that this year started with landmark progress in the field of global disarmament is indeed something of which we can all be proud. Exactly a month ago, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force 90 days after its fiftieth ratification. Malaysia was the forty-sixth State party to the Treaty and is proud to be part of this historic achievement.

Malaysia believes that the Treaty is legally sound, feasible to implement and will create the necessary legal norm that will render nuclear weapons categorically unacceptable.

We also believe that it will complement the existing international legal instruments relating to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, particularly the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

The Tenth NPT Review Conference is scheduled to take place in August 2021. Despite the several postponements to the Review Conference, the States parties must remain committed and strive for its success. Malaysia will continue to work closely with other States parties and stakeholders to create the much needed positive momentum and generate greater prospects for success at the Review Conference.

Malaysia supports the call made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his address of 28 January 2021 outlining his 10 priorities for 2021 to reverse the erosion of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. We also welcome the decision by the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START for a further five years.

Malaysia reiterates the great importance that it attaches to this Conference as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community. My delegation believes that, for the Conference to move forward, all member States should demonstrate strong political will, combined with the readiness to compromise, and exercise utmost flexibility.

Mr. President, Malaysia recognizes and commends your efforts, along with those of the other members of the group of six Presidents of the current session, to continue consultations in order to find common ground on the proposed package. We assure you of our support at every opportunity to achieve a positive outcome of this year's session. My delegation remains ready to work with you and other member States towards this endeavour.

The President: I thank Dato Kamarudin Jaffar, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the presidency and the group of six Presidents of the current session. We will now hear a statement by Ms. Daniela Rodríguez Martínez of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Ms. Rodríguez Martínez (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, on behalf of the President of my country, Nicolás Maduro Moros, and the Minister of People's Power for Foreign Affairs, Jorge Arreaza, we extend our warm greetings to the member States of the Conference on Disarmament.

Today, our world is facing great challenges to international peace and security caused by the growing trend towards unilateralism and the failure to fulfil international commitments, which, together with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, represent great existential challenges for humanity. The multifaceted nature of the threats facing our countries makes the work of this Conference all the more important in that it can provide the world with a privileged platform for negotiation and confidence-building as a guarantee of peace and security.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers nuclear disarmament to be the highest priority on the international security agenda. For this reason, we believe that a comprehensive review of the implementation of the three pillars of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) could help to bring about a world free of nuclear weapons through their total, irreversible and verifiable elimination without discrimination. Venezuela therefore considers it important to ensure that the Tenth NPT Review Conference is held in the best possible conditions, with sufficient space for meetings and consultations, guaranteeing the equal and full participation of all States parties.

As a country that does not possess nuclear weapons, Venezuela welcomes the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This important legal instrument provides for an express and comprehensive ban on these weapons and addresses the humanitarian impact of their testing and use. For this reason, Venezuela considers this to be one of the most important developments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation for the past 50 years. It takes us one step closer to fulfilling the aspiration of totally eliminating these weapons.

Venezuela is concerned about the consequences of the growing tendency for some States to make nuclear disarmament dependent on geopolitical considerations and non-

consensual subjective assessments of the international security environment. That is why Venezuela rejects all attempts to re-establish nuclear weapons as a key aspect of national security doctrines, as the United States of America did in its Nuclear Posture Review of February 2018.

Venezuela welcomes the achievements of the first Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, which took place in November 2019 in New York, and stresses that efforts must be made to ensure that the resolution adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference is applied to the Middle East. Venezuela rejects the use of outer space for military purposes and stresses the importance of formulating a legally binding instrument that would prevent outer space from becoming a new theatre of war.

Venezuela welcomes the ratification by Cuba of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We also welcome the decision taken by the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START on nuclear disarmament until February 2026.

Considering the existing challenges to international humanitarian law and human rights, we are concerned about the growing use and refinement of lethal autonomous weapons systems, including uncrewed aerial vehicles of the sort used in an attempt to assassinate President Nicolás Maduro in 2018.

Venezuela wishes to stress that Latin America and the Caribbean is a zone of peace and a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In this regard, in keeping with the diplomacy of peace based on Bolivarian ideals, we invite all member States to undertake their deliberations in a spirit of dialogue and collaboration so that this Conference can resume its substantive work and fulfil its mandate as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament. We are all called on to help this forum to resume its mission and to avoid becoming politicized.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Daniela Rodríguez Martínez of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I now give the floor to Mr. Juan Manuel Pino Forero, Minister of Public Security of Panama.

Mr. Pino Forero (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): As the Minister of Public Security of Panama, I share my Government's interest in achieving global disarmament, as set out in the various resolutions adopted by the General Assembly.

As you are all aware, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was ratified by Panama in 2019 and entered into force on 22 January 2021. This constitutes a momentous step forward and serves to raise awareness of the catastrophic consequences for humanity of the use of nuclear weapons.

Furthermore, the impact of the so-called "arms race" on humanity is negative, long-lasting and irreversible. It undermines the economy and world peace and security and entails the conscious and systematic destruction of the environment. As a State, we believe in, and are committed to, strengthened, inclusive and renewed multilateral cooperation as a positive route to peace. Against this backdrop, it is a priority for States to work together to prevent an arms race. We believe that, until such time as total nuclear disarmament has been achieved, it is necessary for the international community to establish effective mechanisms to ensure the security of non-nuclear-weapon States.

Panama believes that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially the new types of weapons and systems, constitutes a serious threat to world peace, democratic stability and national and international security. We reiterate the need to abide by the guidelines set out at the Conference by promoting a comprehensive programme for the eradication of weapons of mass destruction. We are aware that we bear responsibility for establishing a more peaceful international society. For this reason, we must reiterate to world leaders the enormous benefits of eliminating weapons of mass destruction, which have an incalculable impact on society and the economy.

We believe that both nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons should be addressed within the framework of multilateral cooperation, in the firm belief that the recent entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons represents a commitment to world peace and denuclearization. We are facing a security

challenge that must be tackled decisively by preventing the spread of weapons and implementing effective means of control against this threat, which affects the international community.

By historical vocation, Panama is a country that has been, and will continue to be, committed to one of the most important goals for humanity: achieving peace in a world without nuclear weapons. That is why, as observers at this Conference, we reaffirm our condemnation of any manifestation, act or action that threatens world peace and international security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Juan Manuel Pino Forero, Minister of Public Security of Panama, for his country's interest, as an observer, in the work of this Conference. I now give the floor to Mr. Stanislav Raščan, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia.

Mr. Raščan (Slovenia) Mr. President, I congratulate you on assuming the responsibilities of the President of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Belgium for its efforts to move our work forward.

Slovenia remains firmly committed to preserving and further advancing effective, treaty-based international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. We support efforts aimed at forging constructive solutions, which will allow the Conference to once again start engaging on issues relevant to peace and security. In this connection, immediate negotiations for a fissile material cut-off treaty would, in our view, be the first logical step to embark on. Let me also say that enlargement of the membership of the Conference is well overdue, and that situation that should be rectified to allow the Conference to reflect its global nature. Slovenia calls for a more vigorous look into this question, with the appointment of a special coordinator. We are convinced that the full participation of countries waiting on the doorstep, including my own, would strengthen the spirit of universality, transparency and multilateralism.

We would also like to raise our deep concerns that, once again, one Member State of the European Union was prevented from participating in the work of the Conference, even as observer.

Mr. President, Slovenia welcomes the agreement reached between the United States and the Russian Federation on extending the New START for an additional five years. This achievement, for which my country campaigned publicly over the past year, represents a significant step for European and international security. At the same time, we also believe that a discussion on a future arms control regime covering more weapons, and eventually more countries, is warranted.

As we look to the forthcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, we should not shy away from being ambitious. We hope that States parties will engage constructively and take further steps to strengthen the implementation of the provisions of all three pillars of the Treaty. Slovenia also supports efforts focused on achieving concrete progress towards full implementation of article VI of the Treaty, bearing in mind that the Treaty remains the only credible path to achieving nuclear disarmament. The ultimate goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons should be achieved through a progressive approach, which must be effective, irreversible, verifiable and universal.

This brings me to the issue of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, since it is also of intrinsic importance for nuclear disarmament, but unfortunately still awaits prompt entry into force. Slovenia calls upon all States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty.

Mr. President, before concluding, I would like to reaffirm that my country has repeatedly expressed its support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as well as its concerns regarding the reduction by Iran of its commitments. I therefore call on Iran to refrain from any further escalatory steps and return to full compliance with its nuclear obligations under the Plan without delay. I also urge all the parties to put serious efforts in its further implementation.

Additionally, I call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return to meaningful negotiations; its acceptance of the International Atomic Energy Agency inspections regime and ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty could be the first step on the way to a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Finally, I would like to underline that Slovenia, as a strong promotor of gender equality and women's empowerment, supports initiatives aimed at ensuring equal and effective participation by women in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. With this, Mr. President, I wish you and the members of the Conference on Disarmament constructive discussions and a fruitful session.

The President: I thank Mr Stanislav Raščan, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, for his statement and for his country's interest in participating as an observer in the work of this Conference.

That concludes our business for today. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.