
Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and sixty-ninth plenary meeting

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President: Mr. Yuri Borissov Sterk (Bulgaria)



The President: I call to order the 1569th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, this morning's plenary will be devoted to the continuation of our discussion on agenda item 1 of the Conference, focusing on nuclear disarmament verification. I now turn to the speakers remaining on my list from yesterday; the first speaker on the list for today is the distinguished delegate of Iraq, speaking on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mr. Al-Taii (Iraq): I have the honour to read the general statement of the Group of 21.

The Group of 21 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 emphasize the importance of preserving it by strengthening the nature, role and mandate of this body. We must underscore the need to redouble our efforts in order to reinforce and revitalize the Conference on Disarmament and preserve its credibility through the resumption of substantive work including, inter alia, negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The Group of 21 reaffirms its statement on nuclear disarmament contained in document CD/2192, and all the other working papers submitted to the Conference in 2020.

Nuclear disarmament continues to be the highest priority of the international community. The Group of 21 reiterates its deep concern at the danger posed to the survival of humankind by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and their possible use or threat of use. The Group, stressing its strong commitment to nuclear disarmament, underscores the urgent need to commence negotiations on this issue in the Conference on Disarmament without further delay. As the highest priority, the Conference on Disarmament should start negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, including a convention prohibiting the possession, development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use of nuclear weapons, leading to their global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination, with a specified time framework. In this context, the Group recalls its working paper contained in CD/2192 that calls for the urgent commencement of negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament, in particular on a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction.

The Group welcomes the formal proclamation, for the first time in history, of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace, on the occasion of the Second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), held in Havana, Cuba, on 28 and 29 January 2014, which included the commitment of all States in that region to promote nuclear disarmament as a priority objective and to contribute to general and complete disarmament. We hope that this proclamation will be followed by other political proclamations of zones of peace in other regions of the world. The Group welcomes the Political Declaration of Quito, adopted at the Fourth Summit of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Quito, Ecuador, on 27 January 2016, which reaffirms, inter alia, the commitment of CELAC to the preservation of international peace and security, political independence and nuclear disarmament conducive to general, total and verifiable disarmament. The Group also welcomes the Political Declaration of Punta Cana, adopted at the Fifth Summit of Latin American and Caribbean States, held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on 25 January 2017, which reaffirms, inter alia, the commitment of CELAC to achieving a total prohibition on and the elimination of nuclear weapons. CELAC reaffirms its commitment to the consolidation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a zone of peace and highlights the region's character as the first ever zone free of nuclear weapons, as established by the Treaty of Tlatelolco. The Group welcomes the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Tlatelolco on 14 February 2017, held in Mexico, in the framework of the twenty-fifth session of the General Conference of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Group also welcomes the African Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, known as the Treaty of Pelindaba, signed in Cairo, Egypt, in 1996. The Treaty, which came into effect on 15 July 2009, seeks to prevent the stationing of nuclear explosive devices and prohibit the testing of nuclear weapons and the dumping of radioactive waste on the continent. For the purpose of ensuring compliance with the obligations under the Treaty, the African Commission on Nuclear Energy was established.

The Group reaffirms the absolute validity of multilateral diplomacy in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, and expresses its determination to promote multilateralism as the core principle of negotiations in these areas. The Group welcomes the convening of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament on 26 September 2013 and reaffirms the related resolution 75/45 on follow-up to the meeting. As the former Secretary-General of the United Nations rightly mentioned in the Conference on Disarmament in 2015, “The high-level meeting of the General Assembly on nuclear disarmament demonstrated that this issue remains a major international priority and deserves attention at the highest levels”. In this vein, the Group fully supports the goals of this resolution, in particular its call for an urgent decision by the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiations on nuclear disarmament, particularly a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction. The Group of 21 will make a separate statement in the Conference on Disarmament plenary on this issue. The Group also welcomes the decision to convene, in New York, on a date to be decided, a United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament to review the progress made in this regard. The Group welcomes with appreciation the establishment of 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, and the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly organized every year to mark and promote this international day, highlighting the events held around the world to celebrate it, and calls on Governments, parliaments and civil society to take further action annually to commemorate the day.

The Group reaffirms the importance of the multilateral disarmament machinery. It notes the report of the Open-Ended Working Group mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons and hopes that it will contribute towards negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament and, in particular, a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons to prohibit their possession, development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use or threat of use and to provide for their destruction.

The Group takes note of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 22 January 2021 and also notes that 86 States had already signed the Treaty and 52 States had ratified or acceded to it as at 22 January 2021. In this regard, the States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty are fully committed to its implementation and to promoting its universalization in order to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Group reaffirms that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Pending the achievement of the complete elimination of such weapons, the Group reaffirms the urgent need for the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument to effectively assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as a matter of high priority. The Group expresses concern that, despite the commitment of the nuclear-weapon States and long-standing requests by non-nuclear-weapon States to receive such legally binding assurances, no tangible progress has been achieved in this regard. It is a matter of more concern that non-nuclear-weapon States have been subject, implicitly or explicitly, to nuclear threats by some nuclear-weapon States, contrary to their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. The Group also calls for the commencement of negotiations in order to reach agreement on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use

of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/34.

The Group expresses its deepest concern over the immediate, indiscriminate, and massive death and destruction that would be caused by any nuclear weapon detonation and its long-term catastrophic consequences on human health, environment and other vital economic resources, which would thus endanger the life of present and future generations. The Group believes that a full realization of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons must underpin all approaches, efforts and international commitments towards nuclear disarmament, on the basis of an inclusive process involving all States.

In this context, the Group concurs with the statement delivered on 23 May 2015 by the former United Nations Secretary-General that there is a growing understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and, in this regard, welcomes the hosting of the conferences on this subject convened in Oslo on 4 and 5 March 2013, in Mexico on 13 and 14 February and in Vienna on 8 and 9 December 2014.

The States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) welcome the spirit of the findings of the conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. We call on all nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty to implement their unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals, leading to nuclear disarmament, to which all States parties are committed to under article VI of the Treaty. Given the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and unacceptable risks and threats associated with the detonation of a nuclear weapon, we will endeavour to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders in efforts to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. In this regard, we note the relevant resolutions adopted at the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly.

The Group of 21 expresses its disappointment that the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to undertake substantive work on its agenda. The Group takes note of various efforts to reach consensus on the Conference's programme of work and all subsequent decisions, efforts and proposals towards this end.

The Group reiterates the urgency with which the Conference on Disarmament must execute its mandate, as set out in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and adopt and implement a balanced and comprehensive programme of work on the basis of its agenda, while taking into account the security interests of all States and dealing with, inter alia, the core issues, particularly nuclear disarmament, in accordance with the rules of procedure, including the rule of consensus. The Group encourages you, Mr. President, to spare no effort and to continue wide consultations with all delegations to the Conference on Disarmament to achieve this goal.

The Group furthermore believes that promoting the work of the United Nations disarmament machinery hinges on the need to exercise political will, taking into account the collective security interests of all States.

While expressing its deep concern over the persistent lack of consensus on the implementation of the multilateral disarmament agenda in the United Nations disarmament machinery, particularly in fulfilling the commitments on nuclear disarmament as the highest priority, the Group reaffirms its support for the early convening of the fourth special session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to disarmament and expresses its deep concern over the fact that the session is yet to be convened. The Group welcomes the successful outcome of the work of the Open-Ended Working Group, convened pursuant to resolution 65/66 and decision 70/551 of the General Assembly, which held its substantive sessions in 2016 and 2017, under the able chairmanship of Ecuador, adopting, by consensus, recommendations on objectives and the agenda for the fourth special session, reaffirming the importance of the existing United Nations disarmament machinery, while considering ways to strengthen it and improve its effectiveness. The Group welcomes the endorsement by

the General Assembly of the report of the Open-Ended Working Group and the substantive recommendations contained therein.

The Group of 21 expresses its strong support for the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction and reiterates the importance of the early establishment of this zone. The Group acknowledges the success achieved in the convening by the Secretary-General of the first session of the Conference to elaborate a treaty on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, in accordance with the mandate entrusted to him by the General Assembly in its decision 73/546. The Group calls upon all States to actively support this process and to contribute to its success.

The States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty express their disappointment and deep concern that three States parties, including two States that bear special responsibility as Treaty depositary and co-sponsors of the resolution on the Middle East adopted by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, blocked consensus on the draft outcome document of the ninth Review Conference, including on the process for establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, as contained in the resolution on the Middle East. This could undermine efforts towards strengthening the Treaty regime as a whole. The States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty reaffirm that the 1995 resolution on the Middle East continues to constitute the basis for the establishment of such a zone and remains valid until fully implemented. The States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty also express their serious concern over the lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution and, in accordance with paragraph 6 of the resolution, “call upon all States party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and in particular the nuclear-weapon States, to extend their cooperation and to exert their utmost efforts with a view to ensuring the early establishment by regional parties of a Middle East zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction” and reaffirm that the co-sponsors of the resolution must take all the necessary measures to fully implement it without further delay. The States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty express their utmost concern that the persistent lack of implementation of the 1995 resolution, contrary to the decisions made at the relevant Review Conferences, erodes the credibility of the Treaty and disrupts the delicate balance among its three pillars, taking into account that the indefinite extension of the Treaty is inextricably linked to the implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. In this context, the States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty reaffirm the urgency of the accession of Israel to the Treaty without further delay and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. While the lack of agreement on an outcome document could undermine the NPT regime, the States of the Group of 21 that are parties to the Treaty emphasize the continued validity of the commitments made in 1995, 2000 and 2010, particularly the unequivocal undertaking to work towards nuclear disarmament, and call for their full implementation without further delay.

The Group recognizes the importance of continuing consultations on the question of the possible expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Group emphasizes the urgent need to address the prevalent dichotomy between the lack of progress in disarmament and the increasing emphasis and efforts on non-proliferation. The Group calls upon all member States to manifest their support for, and investment in, disarmament and non-proliferation education in a balanced and comprehensive manner through training and fellowship provided by the United Nations, as a priority. In this context, the Group appreciates the annual fellowship programme on disarmament and international security instituted by India in 2019 and the disarmament orientation course organized since 2019 by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

The Group also recognizes the importance of enhancing engagement between civil society and the Conference on Disarmament, in accordance with decisions taken by the Conference, and continues to support the strengthening of the Conference's interaction with civil society. In this regard, the Group welcomes the convening of the Conference on Disarmament-Civil Society Forum on 19 March 2015, the second informal civil society forum on 22 June 2016, the Conference on Disarmament-Civil Society Dialogue on 17 August 2018 and the virtual event entitled "Conference on Disarmament meets Civil Society. Lessons of the Pandemic: Rethinking the nexus between disarmament and security" held on 3 July 2020.

The President: I thank the distinguished delegate of Iraq for his statement. I now give the floor to the next speaker, Ambassador Hashmi of Pakistan.

Mr. Hashmi (Pakistan): In line with the framework that you have outlined for our meeting, Mr. President, I wish to share their perspective on issues related to agenda item 1, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament.

We align ourselves with the statement made by Iraq on behalf of the Group of 21 on the Conference's nuclear disarmament agenda.

Mr. President, nuclear disarmament has remained a top priority of the international community since the advent of nuclear weapons. The very first resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in January 1946 called for, *inter alia*, nuclear disarmament. This long-standing global priority was accorded its due importance by the Conference on Disarmament at its first session in 1979, when it included nuclear disarmament as its first agenda item.

During the past 75 years of the United Nations and the 42 years of this Conference, the issue of nuclear disarmament has remained an overriding and overripe priority of the international community. Yet this global priority has not seen progress at the multilateral level. In fact, over the past several decades, it has witnessed regression.

The reasons for this backsliding are not as difficult to fathom as some would like us to believe. At the root is an unwillingness to fulfil legal obligations and solemn commitments. Unfortunately, accountability has been conspicuously missing for the failure to fulfil nuclear disarmament obligations under the relevant international legal framework.

It is against this backdrop then that we hear self-serving narratives and see moves to deflect international attention to other issues. We are told that nuclear disarmament cannot happen; that we should forget about it and pursue cost-free endeavours, such as quantitative capping of fissile material.

Another fundamental obstacle to progress in this vital area is the refusal by some to recognize the linkages between nuclear disarmament and the security considerations that drive States to acquire these levels of weapons. The organic linkage between nuclear deterrence and skewed conventional capabilities, power asymmetries and threat perceptions, at both the regional and the global levels, continues to be ignored.

On the other hand, strategic developments at the global level are increasingly worrisome, as nuclear weapons are being modernized. Qualitative and quantitative expansion of nuclear arsenals, in contravention of legal obligations and against the grain of international consensus, is being pursued unabated.

Mr. President, progress in nuclear disarmament continues to be stalled. Thousands of these weapons and their means of delivery are being retained almost indefinitely. Seen in conjunction with the pursuit of ongoing modernization, there are potential and real risks of a revival of the nuclear arms race instead of its cessation.

Several decades ago, the strategic implications of nuclear weapons were tied to their means of delivery. Lethality against a potential adversary was a function of these systems. In the age we live in now, with increasing weaponization, integration and operationalization of space and cyber technologies and hypersonic delivery systems, this lethality and the ensuing risks have multiplied manyfold. Taken together, these developments could trigger or ignite arm races in the conventional and nuclear domains. And if they were allowed to take place, the prospects of nuclear disarmament would further diminish, if not end altogether.

Mr. President, in the face of these negative developments and disturbing trends, the larger question is: what is going to give? The strategic environment should not be an excuse for inaction. It should serve as a call for renewed diplomatic efforts. We do not discount the daunting nature of the challenge in this endeavour. A few months ago, my delegation proposed a road map to address these underlying factors and the idea that we should pursue a nuclear disarmament agenda that lives up to the avowed ethos of an international rules-based order. Let me recount some key elements that have direct consequences for nuclear disarmament.

First, we have no option but to start from the basic principle, that is, recognition of the right to equal security for all States, as was unanimously agreed in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. This is an essential prerequisite for progress in all 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, including 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, 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, we should pursue a balanced reduction in the number of armed forces and conventional armaments, especially at the regional and subregional levels.

Fourth, the nuclear-weapon States must demonstrate a renewed commitment to achieving nuclear disarmament within a reasonable time frame, to revalidating the agreement reached with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and recognizing their legal responsibility within the context of a re-energized collective security system that can guarantee peace and stability in a world without nuclear weapons.

Fifth, 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 materials treaty.

Sixth, until nuclear disarmament is achieved, non-nuclear-weapon States must be given assurances that they will not be faced with the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by nuclear-weapon States through a universal, unconditional and legally binding treaty negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament.

Seventh, we need to strengthen the international legal regime to prevent the militarization of outer space.

Eighth, we must adopt an agreed criteria-based and non-discriminatory approach to evolve the promotion of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy under appropriate international safeguards.

Ninth, the deployment and use of cyber weapons, autonomous weapons and other new types of weapons systems need to be brought under international regulation and, finally, we need to address regional security issues through dialogue and diplomacy.

Mr. President, I take this opportunity to reiterate Pakistan's call to achieve the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world in a universal, verifiable, time-bound and non-discriminatory manner. As recognized in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the objective of this process should be undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments and military forces.

Concurrently, concrete measures are needed to address the regional and global challenges which generate insecurities in States, especially those with asymmetries in their conventional capabilities to defend themselves.

Nuclear disarmament therefore needs to be pursued in a comprehensive and holistic manner in accordance with the principles agreed in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Mr. President, let me now share our perspective on the presentations made yesterday regarding nuclear disarmament verification.

It goes without saying that verification is an essential element for assuring compliance with any future agreements on nuclear disarmament. Importantly, however, while a conceptual exploration and a shared understanding of the principles of nuclear disarmament verification can contribute towards the verification aspects of an international instrument on nuclear disarmament, they should not be seen as a precondition for the commencement of negotiations on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Nuclear disarmament verification itself can be best addressed in the context of a specific treaty regime and not in an abstract manner or in a vacuum, nor as an end in itself. Verification has to be rooted in specific treaties.

We appreciate the fact that the conclusions reached by the Group of Governmental Experts in its consensus report acknowledged, *inter alia*, that the role of verification in advancing nuclear development will be determined on a case-by-case basis in the context of the negotiation of legally binding agreements in the area of nuclear disarmament.

We are pleased with the adoption by consensus of the substantive report of the Group of Governmental Experts and look forward to contributing constructively to the work of the current Group of Governmental Experts.

Mr. President, going forward, therefore, clarity will be paramount, if efforts on verification are to remain purposeful. Advancing substantive work in the Conference on Disarmament will be essential in establishing the timescale for and modalities of nuclear disarmament, and providing clarity and giving context to our efforts on nuclear disarmament verification. At the same time, we have a universally agreed framework in which to anchor our verification work. Let me cite two examples. The consensus final document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament states that “the form and modalities of the verification to be provided for in any specific agreement depend on and should be determined by the purposes, scope and nature of the agreement”.

The United Nations Disarmament Commission, in its 1988 principles of verification, agreed that “determinations about the adequacy, effectiveness, and acceptability of specific methods and arrangements intended to verify compliance can only be made within the context of that agreement”.

Mr. President, as is evident from these examples, there is no one-size-fits-all solution in verification, and the context that is the specific treaty shapes it. The work of the Group of Governmental Experts should therefore continue to remain a conceptual exploration of principles rather than be turned into an illusory pursuit of tenuous tools or institutions that are not needed. It is only by anchoring our approach in the agreed principles that we can truly hope to produce outcomes that serve the purpose of achieving nuclear disarmament and putting an end to the nuclear arms race for good.

The President: I thank Ambassador Hashmi for his statement. I now give the floor to Ambassador Hwang of France.

Mr. Hwang (France) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, I am very pleased that the Conference on Disarmament is resuming its substantive work, despite the regrettable lack of a programme of work. I shall begin my statement by recalling the speech given by the President of the French Republic at the War College in February 2020, in which he called on all States to rally behind a simple programme, in accordance with article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The programme covers the following four points: first, strict compliance with the key instrument, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the preservation of its primacy; second, the launch, at the Conference on Disarmament, of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and the preservation and universalization of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; third, continued work on nuclear disarmament verification; and fourth, the start of real work to reduce strategic risks.

I will devote my statement today to the key issue of nuclear disarmament verification, and I thank the speakers for their presentations. I was very reassured by yesterday's debate on the issue of verification, since we know that, in the recent past, some States have convinced themselves that nuclear disarmament processes could lead to instruments without verification and that verification is not a necessary part of disarmament. This is obviously an illusion or, quite simply, a mistake, and I think that yesterday's debate clearly emphasized the importance of verification.

Mr. President, as parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, we all share the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control, as enshrined in article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In this context, effective verification of nuclear disarmament is crucial to achieving the general and complete disarmament provided for in article VI. For my country, a disarmament verification regime cannot be established in the abstract; it must be linked to a specific disarmament treaty that must be negotiated by its parties and adapted to the particular case of each State.

In addition, total and highly intrusive verification is neither realistic, nor desirable, nor workable. The aim of a verification regime should be to provide assurance to the parties to a treaty that the obligations for which it provides are being met, bearing in mind principles such as effectiveness, simplicity, effective and efficient attribution of costs, non-interference and, of course, the assurance of nuclear non-proliferation.

My country has participated in the work of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification since 2015. This is an informal partnership and a very valuable forum through which nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States are able to develop a better understanding of the procedural and technical challenges of nuclear disarmament verification. The challenges include non-proliferation constraints and – a point that I stress – the protection of secrecy. We therefore call on all nuclear-weapon States and other nuclear-possessor States to engage with and involve themselves in this work.

My country also participated in the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification in 2018 and 2019, which led to the adoption by consensus of a report whose conclusions are to serve as a basis for future work, and voted in favour of General Assembly resolution 74/50 establishing the next Group of Governmental Experts. Lastly, my country supports action 8 of the United Nations Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, which concerns nuclear disarmament verification.

Mr. President, my country is also in favour of carrying out practical nuclear disarmament verification exercises. In this regard, I would like to highlight the experience of the NuDiVe project, which my German colleague and I presented to the Conference on Disarmament last year. This Franco-German exercise was highly instructive. It confirmed the hypotheses of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification regarding the procedures and technologies needed to generate sufficient confidence in the non-diversion of nuclear material during the dismantlement of a nuclear warhead. In the light of this field exercise experience, we can affirm today that it is possible to work with non-nuclear-weapon States on nuclear disarmament verification while respecting both non-proliferation obligations, in accordance with articles I and II of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and, of course, national security interests.

For my country, and doubtless for all the members of our Conference, these are key points that call for vigilance. The NuDiVe exercise also provided an opportunity for multilateral dialogue with non-nuclear-weapon States and, in this regard, nuclear disarmament verification builds common understanding and trust between nuclear-weapon States, non-nuclear-weapon States and nuclear-possessor States, which is a key factor in strategic stability. We have therefore decided, together with Germany, to repeat the experience by organizing a new version of the exercise from 15 to 19 November 2021. The new exercise will involve new techniques, a modified format and new participants. We would like experts from the Group of Governmental Experts to participate. Mr. President, this practical work on nuclear disarmament verification could make a positive and practical contribution to the next Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference. My country therefore supports all initiatives in this area.

The President: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of France for his statement. I now give the floor to the next speaker, the distinguished delegate of Sri Lanka.

Ms. Gunawardena (Sri Lanka): Mr. President, while we regret that the Conference has yet again failed to reach consensus on a programme of work due to apparent lack of political will, we consider this thematic debate an important opportunity for us to reiterate our principled position on agenda item 1, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. This agenda item is of particular significance, given the importance of the upcoming Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We would like to associate ourselves with the Group of 21 statement delivered in this regard today by the distinguished delegate of Iraq.

Mr. President, nuclear disarmament remains our highest priority in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. As acknowledged by all member States of the Conference, including those who possess nuclear weapons, nuclear armament is a direct and constant threat to the very survival of humanity. The danger is real and unimaginable. Perhaps it is important to recall the first paragraph of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, adopted by consensus in 1978, which provides that “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.”

Mr. President, those words were declared back in 1978 but unfortunately have a continuing direct relevance to all member States sitting in this august body today, in 2021. In our view, the main focus of this debate should be on the implementation of the disarmament commitments already agreed under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, including the pursuance of effective measures through effective verification means in relation to article VI of the Treaty.

While we acknowledge the legitimate security concerns of all States and the need to address them in a transparent and comprehensive manner, the expansion of existing nuclear arsenals is an approach that raises clear questions of credibility, particularly under the Treaty regime. Nuclear deterrence is used by some States as a justification to legitimize the continuing existence of nuclear weapons. It is evident that nuclear deterrence does not reduce the risk of accidents, of the weapon falling into the hands of terrorists or of the definite mass destruction that would come with its use. The absence of detonation evidenced by history is mostly due to sheer luck.

We consider that the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only guarantee against their use or the threat of their use and that an irreversible, transparent and credible verification regime is an important cornerstone of the disarmament architecture. However, disarmament verification should not be an end in itself. It is important that nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States work together to develop a shared understanding on irreversible multilateral nuclear disarmament. We are pleased to note the extension of the New START between the United States and the Russian Federation and notice positive developments on bilateral disarmament negotiations. Sri Lanka encourages the nuclear-weapon States to engage in genuine dialogue with each other with a view to disarming their nuclear weapons as soon as possible, based on irreversible, verifiable and transparent verification mechanisms.

We urge all member States not to reverse the hard-earned achievements of the past in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation. We simply have no time to waste. Sri Lanka stands ready to contribute to all efforts on disarmament and non-proliferation within the work of the Conference on Disarmament through a balanced and comprehensive programme of work.

The President: I thank the distinguished delegate of Sri Lanka. Next on my list is the distinguished delegate of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Aliabadi.

Mr. Aliabadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation associates itself with the Group of 21 statement delivered by the distinguished representative of Iraq.

Mr. President, with regard to the agenda of this meeting, as you stated during your consultation with the Group of 21 and reiterated in the last plenary meeting before the end of the first part of the Conference on Disarmament session, we expected that the topics of the thematic debates would be in accordance with the agenda items of the Conference on Disarmament, or that the titles would be modified accordingly, but the content and the subject remained unchanged. We are not pleased with the way that this thematic debate has been organized, and it is not clear that what is being proposed will help the Conference on Disarmament to further its substantive work towards nuclear disarmament.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is fully committed to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and, as the most recent victim of the use of weapons of mass destruction in recent history, is highly motivated to pursue that noble goal in cooperation with other delegations.

International peace, security and stability have been eroded by a range of serious and complex challenges, including the continued existence of thousands of nuclear weapons, disregard for nuclear disarmament obligations, the tendency to gain global dominance through military hardware, expansionism founded on the pre-emptive doctrine and misuse of international bodies, and terrorism. Fuelled by the re-emergence of an arms race, those challenges have deepened distrust and insecurity among States and weakened the credibility and effectiveness of multilateral mechanisms.

We are convinced that nuclear disarmament contributes essentially to international peace and security. Iran reiterates that the only guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is their total, irreversible and verifiable elimination. Pending that, the non-nuclear-weapon States have the right to enjoy unconditional and irreversible legally binding assurances against the use or threat of use of such weapons.

Mr. President, the integrity and credibility of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty depends on the full implementation of all the obligations set out therein, including in its article VI concerning nuclear disarmament. Nuclear disarmament, as one of the three pillars of the Treaty, is the most important obligation of the nuclear-weapon States.

Under article VI, as unanimously decided by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion in 1996, "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control". This is an explicit legal obligation, with no ambiguity or conditionality.

Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the non-nuclear-weapon States undertake not to receive or develop nuclear weapons in exchange for the nuclear-weapon States committing themselves to nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control.

The aggressive nuclear posture reviews of the United States and the United Kingdom continue to represent a material breach of those countries' obligations under the Treaty, particularly its article VI, and other commitments made by nuclear-weapon States during the past Review Conferences, including the 13 practical steps on disarmament agreed to at the 2000 Review Conference and the action plan on nuclear disarmament agreed at the 2010 Review Conference.

Those irresponsible and dangerous policies entertain the idea of the utility of retaining nuclear weapons and definitely advocate the first use of such weapons, threaten their use against non-nuclear-weapon States and pursue the development of new types of nuclear weapons. Those provocative policies, which have renewed the nuclear arms race, represent the greatest threat to the credibility of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the objective of nuclear disarmament. On the eve of the tenth Review Conference, we should bear in mind that upholding the integrity and credibility of the Treaty depends on the full and balanced implementation of the obligations contained therein, in particular on nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, Iran welcomes the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 22 January 2021, as an important step in the right direction and a clear indication of the international community's collective demand for total nuclear disarmament. This Treaty is indicative of the deep frustration of the non-nuclear-weapon States at the non-compliance of the nuclear-weapon States with their obligation to work towards the total

elimination of nuclear weapons. That frustration is exacerbated by the development of new nuclear weapons and irrational nuclear doctrines to justify the use of those weapons as a means of terrorizing nations.

For over five decades, the international community has emphasized that the nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East would enhance international peace and security. Yet the Israeli regime, which has rejected and violated and ignored all international regimes on weapons of mass destruction, continues to be the only impediment to realizing such a zone, due to its non-adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, its nuclear arsenals and its continued clandestine operation of unsafe nuclear facilities.

Countries in the region and worldwide should unite in curbing the threats posed by the Israeli regime's weapons of mass destruction and pursuing the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East as soon as possible. We reiterate our call to the international community to utilize any opportunity to compel Israel to promptly accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear-weapon party without any precondition and to place all of its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency full-scope safeguards.

Mr. President, the disarmament obligation is universal and unconditional; accordingly, Iran strongly rejects any initiative or concept that aims to create conditionality from nuclear disarmament obligations, such as creating the conditions for nuclear disarmament or creating an environment for nuclear disarmament, as proposed by the United States. We believe that nuclear disarmament should be the top priority of our work here in the Conference on Disarmament, and we are ready to move with you and other delegations to that end.

The President: Thank you. The next speaker on my list is Ambassador Liddle of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Liddle (United Kingdom): Mr. President, as our recent Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy makes clear, the United Kingdom remains committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We continue to work for the preservation and strengthening of effective arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation measures.

One of the principal ways we do this is through research into nuclear disarmament and arms control verification. Effective verification is a key enabler of nuclear disarmament. Alongside transparency and irreversibility, it is widely recognized as one of the core principles of disarmament, and it is impossible to imagine effective measures on nuclear disarmament, or indeed a path to a world without nuclear weapons or the maintenance of that state once achieved, that do not involve extremely robust verification regimes.

The unique challenge in the nuclear domain is to provide a very high degree of confidence that disarmament has occurred without releasing proliferative or classified information, particularly nuclear weapon design information. Along with seeking to improve the security environment, working to solve the challenges to effective nuclear disarmament verification is the most important practical effort we can make towards realizing our goal of a world without nuclear weapons, under strict and effective international control and with undiminished security for all.

Mr. President, when the United Kingdom and Norway initiated the United Kingdom-Norway Initiative on nuclear disarmament verification in 2007, it was the first time a nuclear-weapon State and a non-nuclear-weapon State had worked together to explore the challenges of nuclear weapons arms control and disarmament verification. In 2015, we were joined by Sweden and the United States to form the Quad Nuclear Verification Partnership, which conducted the first-ever multilateral nuclear disarmament verification exercise, known as LETTERPRESS, in October 2017, to explore the practical challenges associated with the monitoring and verification of nuclear weapons declarations. We have also played a key role in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, launched in December 2014.

All these initiatives – and others, such as the Franco-German exercise in September 2019 that we heard about earlier – have shown that non-nuclear-weapon States have an important role to play in nuclear disarmament verification research and the development of

future verification systems. Nuclear disarmament will affect the security of all States, and the interdisciplinary nature of verification research means that it does not need to be confined to those States that have established civil or military nuclear programmes. There are lessons to learn from non-nuclear arms control and disarmament verification as well. We therefore encourage non-nuclear-weapon States who have yet to do so to get involved.

It is also, of course, vital that all nuclear possessor States engage in this work and support nuclear disarmament verification research, domestically and internationally. Achieving a world without nuclear weapons will require a verification regime in place on the territory of all possessor States, so it is important that all possessor States understand and contribute to working out how this could be achieved.

Mr. President, the United Kingdom participated actively in the 2018–2019 Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. We welcome the Group's consensus report and, in particular, its acknowledgement of the essential role of verification at all stages of the disarmament process. The discussions the Group held on ideas for supporting capacity-building internationally, such as a group of scientific and technical experts and a voluntary funding mechanism, were particularly useful; it is important to develop global capacity in this specialist field in a diverse and inclusive manner. The United Kingdom was proud to co-sponsor General Assembly resolution 74/50 establishing a new Group of Government Experts in 2021 and 2022, and we look forward to continuing to play a constructive and active role in that Group's discussions.

The United Kingdom also continues to research nuclear disarmament and arms control verification nationally, through the programme at the Atomic Weapons Establishment, and internationally, as part of the Quad Partnership, the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and bilateral programmes with the United States and Sweden. Despite the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we are pleased that national and international research has continued, albeit sometimes in an adapted manner. We look forward to sharing more detailed information on progress with the rest of the international community over the course of the next year, both in a national capacity and in conjunction with our partners.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom and now I give the floor to the distinguished representative of Israel on a point of order.

Ms. Maayan (Israel): Mr. President, it is unfortunate that I must make a point of order during this important discussion. We demand that the Islamic Republic of Iran, a country that violates international agreements, undermines the stability of the Middle East, encourages non-compliance and is responsible for the proliferation of arms in our region, refers to us by our official name, the State of Israel.

The President: Thank you. I have to remind all participants and speakers in this debate to abstain from disrespectful or offensive language, and to refer to member States and observer States of this Conference by their official name as endorsed by the United Nations. I now give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the distinguished delegate of Canada, Mr. Fetz.

Mr. Fetz (Canada): Mr. President, Canada is of the view that nuclear disarmament cannot be achieved without verification. Verification is key to providing confidence that commitments are being fulfilled. It increases confidence by deterring the use of subterfuge. The better the verification mechanism, the more confidence it builds.

As a non-nuclear-weapon State with a nuclear industry and research agencies, Canada is proud to be active on nuclear disarmament verification research. It is also proud of the work of the International Partnership on Disarmament Verification, which is continuously working on ways to improve verification and implement findings through table-top exercises. For the 2019–2021 period, Canada has provided Can\$ 1.2 million to support this initiative. Canada will continue to support the initiative by sending its qualified technical experts to meetings, and is currently co-chairing both the Host Country and the Inspector task groups.

(spoke in French)

We also look forward to participating in the next Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification to further discuss the relevant issues. We hope that we can make progress on these in order to achieve a positive outcome with regard to compliance with disarmament commitments. We also hope that the work that we are doing on nuclear disarmament verification and the sharing of global expertise will be leveraged through renewed and tangible global efforts in the areas of arms control and disarmament.

The President: I thank the distinguished delegate of Canada. I now give the floor to Ambassador Gabriëlse of the Netherlands.

Mr. Gabriëlse (Netherlands): The Netherlands welcomes the decision by the six Presidents of the 2021 session of the Conference to organize a series of thematic debates, although we regret that no consensus has been found this session on how to organize our work in 2021. These thematic debates allow us to have substantive discussions based on the agenda of the Conference, starting off with a timely discussion on agenda item 1, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. Allow me to outline my country's position on this agenda item.

Mr. President, if we are to achieve our common goal of having a world free of nuclear weapons, it is clear that much more work still needs to be done. During times when the multilateral disarmament architecture is under pressure, it is vital to curb this downward trend and build upon recent successes, such as the extension of the recent New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, in order to find convergence of views in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. As we approach the tenth Review Conference of Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Netherlands reiterates its priority, of strengthening the Treaty as the cornerstone for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and a key element in sustaining and promoting international security and stability.

With this in mind, the Netherlands will strive for a successful outcome from the Review Conference, to form the basis for the next review cycle and the future of the Treaty as a whole. In working towards that successful outcome, States parties should show political commitment and seek convergence of opinions where possible. Both the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament take on that shared responsibility and work together with their respective members to identify areas where progress is possible, and compromise where necessary.

In this regard, the role of the nuclear-weapon States in the process being pursued by the nuclear-weapon States, known as the P-5 process, cannot be overstated. Their leadership is key to fostering progress within the context of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, especially given the current circumstances, where not only the international disarmament architecture is under pressure, but the multilateral system, as a whole, finds itself constrained. When it comes to article VI of the Treaty, the nuclear-weapon States have a responsibility to strive for its full implementation. Initiatives to strengthen the implementation of article VI should be welcomed. In regard to one of these initiatives, the Netherlands is of the opinion that it could serve as an add-on to the existing article VI acquis and that possibility should be further explored.

Mr. President, the Netherlands has outlined a number of priorities in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its three pillars; nuclear disarmament verification is one of those priorities. As Co-Chair of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, the Netherlands has played an active role in promoting nuclear disarmament verification through the drafting of multiple working papers, co-sponsoring the two Groups of Governmental Experts resolutions on this important topic and actively participating in the first such group. We have also started contributing to the project of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, which is focused on the verification of absence.

The Netherlands is of the opinion that progress on nuclear disarmament verification will contribute further to the effective implementation of article VI of the Treaty by all States parties. Besides the meaningful work done in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative and the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification, we are of the opinion that the Conference on Disarmament, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of

the international community, could also play a role in furthering meaningful work leading to the commencement of negotiations in the Conference.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement. I now give the floor to Ambassador Gamaleldin of Egypt.

Mr. Gamaleldin (Egypt): Mr. President, my delegation associates itself with the statement of the Group of 21 on nuclear disarmament delivered by the delegation of Iraq. Please allow me to start with a few general comments on the work of the Conference.

According to the rules of procedures of the Conference, at the beginning of its annual session, priority should always be given to the adoption, by consensus, of a balanced and comprehensive programme of work that will start multilateral disarmament negotiations. Unfortunately, this practice has been futile in the past years. The reason behind this failure is the lack of political will on the part of a limited number of member States. Due to this stalemate, the Conference has had to improvise and find new ways to continue working around these artificial impediments. Proposals have been made to create working groups and subsidiary bodies but agreement on the modalities for creating those interim structures has been hindered due to the reason I outlined above. All of this has led to an even more diluted arrangement for conducting our work, which allows us merely to exchange views on the agenda items of the Conference. This arrangement cannot and will not lead to any progress in the work of the Conference; it can, at best, contribute to restoring confidence between delegations, if properly utilized.

The lynchpin of the work of the Conference is its permanent agenda, as these well-articulated and consensually agreed items form the backbone of the Conference and any attempts to take it further away from them or to promote controversial concepts and topics at the cost of this agenda will be strongly rejected by the majority of member States and will only further erode the Conference's credibility and decrease the level of trust among its members.

Now I would like to make a few remarks on the topic under consideration today. Nuclear disarmament remains a top priority for Egypt on its disarmament agenda. Egypt, together with other non-nuclear weapon States, has consistently pursued the advancement of global efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament within the framework of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and in other forums, and has called for the full implementation of article VI of the Treaty to ensure the realization of the total and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons in a transparent and verifiable manner. Unfortunately, nuclear weapons continue to exist in staggering numbers, playing an increasing role in the military and security policies and doctrines of nuclear-weapon States. Regrettably, nuclear-weapon States have placed the concept of nuclear deterrence above the objective and purpose of the Treaty for over five decades, disregarding their commitments under article VI and the unequivocal undertaking to work towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Our priority in the Conference on Disarmament is to negotiate a universal, non-discriminatory, internationally and effectively verifiable comprehensive nuclear weapons convention establishing a world free from nuclear weapons within an agreed time frame.

Egypt appreciates all efforts to advance the issue of nuclear disarmament verification as an important pillar that could contribute to achieving the goal of ridding the world of nuclear weapons. However, we believe that there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise available as a result of the decades of safeguards and verification undertaken within the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency and other prominent bilateral agreements and unilateral experiences. The historic experiences of South Africa and the former Soviet republics and several unilateral and bilateral arrangements under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty prove beyond doubt that verifiable nuclear disarmament can be conducted and achieved without further treaties or multilaterally agreed arrangements on nuclear disarmament verification. Egypt fully supports efforts that aim at strengthening the capabilities and knowledge of the international community on the technical aspects of verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, those efforts should focus on providing guidance on the possible pace at which the dismantlement of nuclear arsenals can occur once a political decision is taken by a nuclear-weapon State, and the time frame that is needed for the fissile material previously

used for weaponization purposes to be either eliminated or placed under international safeguards. The modalities for nuclear disarmament verification should put more emphasis on placing the fissile material under safeguards as opposed to overseeing the actual process of dismantling the warheads that contain such material.

To conclude, Egypt believes that, while further work on nuclear disarmament verification is important and useful, it should not be at the expense of the level of commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the objective of nuclear disarmament itself by adding further artificial impediments to the implementation of the relevant obligations and commitments.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Egypt for his statement. I now give the floor to Ambassador Sharma of India.

Mr. Sharma (India): Mr. President, India aligns itself with the statement of the Group of 21 delivered by the distinguished delegation of Iraq, as the coordinator of the Group.

Mr. President, it is unfortunate that the Conference on Disarmament, yet again, has been unable to reach consensus on a programme of work this year. As a result, we have to resort to working in the form of thematic debates. India has consistently maintained that the Conference on Disarmament should adhere to its mandate in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which is to negotiate legally binding instruments. My delegation has demonstrated flexibility and is going along with this format of thematic debates, so as to continue with our work in the Conference on Disarmament, even though our preference would have been to stick to the core issues on the Conference's agenda, not only in form and name, but also in substance. We must first consolidate our past gains and build upon the work of more than four decades. This would underline our sincere commitment to the objectives of the Conference on Disarmament, as envisaged in the Final Document, and ensure genuine progress.

Today's thematic debate is under the framework of agenda item 1, cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. It is clear from the agenda item that our focus should be on nuclear disarmament, and rightly so. In this regard, India maintains that the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world can be achieved through a step-by-step process underwritten by a universal commitment and an agreed multilateral framework that is global, verifiable and non-discriminatory.

In the resolution that India has tabled before the General Assembly every year since 1982 on a convention on the prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons, the Conference on Disarmament is requested to commence negotiations on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances. Similarly, another General Assembly resolution on reducing nuclear danger, tabled by India each year since 1998, has drawn global attention to the hair-trigger alert of nuclear weapons, which carries unacceptable risks of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons. These two resolutions manifest our shared commitment to the common goal of nuclear disarmament.

India has also suggested a number of steps as part of our working paper on nuclear disarmament submitted to the Conference on Disarmament in 2007, contained in document CD/1816, which remain valid. These are: the reaffirmation of the unequivocal commitment of all nuclear-weapon States to the goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons; the reduction of the salience of nuclear weapons in security doctrines; the adoption of measures by nuclear-weapon States to reduce nuclear danger, including the risks of accidental nuclear war; the de-alerting of nuclear weapons to prevent unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons; the negotiation of a global agreement among nuclear-weapon States on no first use of nuclear weapons; the negotiation of a universal and legally binding agreement on non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States; the negotiation of a convention on the complete prohibition of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; and the negotiation of a nuclear weapons convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to the global non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified time frame.

India reiterates its call for the steps outlined in the working paper to be taken, including negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament on a comprehensive convention on

nuclear weapons, as also called for by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and most recently reiterated by the General Assembly in its resolution 75/45, as well as by the Group of 21 in its statement today.

Mr. President, it is my country's considered view that substantive consideration of the issue of nuclear disarmament verification should take place in the context of the negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to the global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame. India has been participating in the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification and supported the relevant General Assembly resolutions in this regard. India believes that the work on nuclear disarmament verification will help to enhance our common understanding of various aspects of nuclear disarmament verification, which could serve as an essential element of a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention. Any work in that framework should build upon the report of the Group of Governmental Experts and past work conducted by the Disarmament Commission on the subject of verification and be in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

At the same time, such work cannot prejudice the nature and scope of any eventual nuclear disarmament instrument, which would, in turn, impact on the verification elements to be agreed on and specific to that instrument. India would also like to underline that the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on verification cannot be a substitute for the established disarmament machinery – the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission – in addressing the issue of nuclear disarmament verification.

We can also draw upon the experience of verification acquired under the Chemical Weapons Convention, which can serve as an important reference point.

International and effective verification is also an important aspect of the agreed mandate for a future treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, and our work may also contribute to our enhanced understanding with regard to a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of India for his statement. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Germany on a point of order.

Mr. Beerwerth (Germany): Mr. President, I would also like to speak briefly on how my distinguished Iranian colleague addressed the state of Israel in his statement. I fully share and second what you, Mr. President, and my distinguished Israeli colleague have said: it is a matter of courtesy and respect and it is thus appropriate and necessary to address the State of Israel using its official name.

The President: Thank you. I would just recall the reminder which I gave following the previous statement on a point of order. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on a point of order.

Mr. Azadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, I have asked for the floor to make a point of order to remind our German colleagues that I think we have to reject any double standard approach regarding the issue he raised. I would ask him whether the German representative took the same position in 2018 when some delegations referred to our colleagues from Syria, calling their country the "Syrian regime". We have to be consistent and have a coherent and holistic approach and avoid any double standards.

The President: Thank you. I can only repeat my call to continue the debates in a spirit of mutual respect and also to refrain from naming States in a way differing from their official designation as endorsed by the United Nations.

Distinguished colleagues, I note that time has sufficiently advanced and I understand that one of our panellists will not be able to stay until the end of our discussion. So I intend now to give the floor to our panellists for possible comments and observation on the debate so far. I will first give the floor to Mr. Osmundsen for any comments on his part.

Mr. Osmundsen (Norway): Thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate. I would also like to thank all the distinguished delegates and colleagues for sharing their views on nuclear disarmament verification and for the kind words offered to me.

I think this has been, so far, a thoroughly stimulating exchange of views. And I will bring these views to the Group of Governmental Experts. We have heard many different views over the course of this debate, but confidence-building, trust and compliance have been central themes to many interventions. Credible verification has an instrumental role in building the necessary confidence and trust that all parties are in compliance with the Treaty. In addition, as has been pointed out by several delegations, verification, while not an end in itself, is an important part of disarmament. And the very activity of taking part in the work on nuclear disarmament verification can in itself build confidence and trust between the partners. As Pavel Podvig said in his introduction yesterday, verification makes the disarmament process more cooperative, which increases confidence and trust. This is not a small achievement. The work on nuclear disarmament verification must be conducted in strict compliance with the international obligations of the participants, such as the non-proliferation obligation of States parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

As we work to move towards a lower number of nuclear weapons, the role of verification will likely increase. From a national point of view, Norway considers the Treaty as the cornerstone of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime, and the Treaty states that disarmament must take place under strict and effective control.

Our view is that, as we move towards zero, which is our ultimate aim, multilateral capabilities on nuclear disarmament verification will be necessary. That is why we believe that this preparatory work is important and that building capabilities and capacities now will benefit or even contribute to future disarmament processes. We consider our voluntary funding mechanism to be vital to our capacity-building.

I take great encouragement from this debate and I thank you all for actively sharing your views.

The President: I thank Mr. Osmundsen for his comments and now I give the floor to the other panellist, Mr. Podvig, for his comments and observations.

Mr. Podvig (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research): Mr. President, I would like to thank all the delegates for their interesting comments and very valuable contributions and say once again how much I appreciate the opportunity to speak at this forum. Having worked in the area for some time, including now as lead on this work at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, I am very happy to see that there is a universal support for the work on nuclear disarmament verification.

Following the discussion, let me just make a couple of points that I hope you will find useful. First of all, on the issue of abstract versus specific verification measures and procedures, there is agreement, as was reflected in the first report of the Group of Governmental Experts, that verification arrangements are linked to a specific agreement in the relevant treaty. However, there is a link that needs to be appreciated, and I can give you an example: in the late 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to reach an agreement that would ban tests of nuclear weapons. A dialogue was held and there was a very specific window of opportunity; the scientific experts from both sides worked on the issue and, in the end, they concluded that, at that time, it was very difficult, if not impossible, to design a verification arrangement that would support the comprehensive test ban, although they agreed that a limited ban, on atmospheric tests, could be supported and verified. If the United States and the Soviet Union had, at that time, had the tools to verify the comprehensive ban on nuclear tests, I think we would have seen a very different scenario unfold over the following years. So it is important to explore what kind of tools and capabilities are available. In the end, the decision will always be political, but the politicians need to have a way of knowing what can or cannot be done.

Another, more recent, example is the idea of a freeze on the total number of nuclear weapons, which was briefly discussed by the United States and Russia last year. And in fact, what is interesting is that the two sides almost reached consensus and an agreement that they would have been ready to commit to. However, it did not work out, largely because of the

uncertainty about verification issues – the two sides had different ideas of what verification of the agreement would entail and whether it would be necessary. Once again, had we had a good understanding of the kind of verification measures that could support such a freeze, I think that the outcome of that discussion between the United States and Russia could have been different.

This is one of the areas where we could actually work. I think it would be interesting to have a discussion on what would be a very specific obligation: a freeze on the total number of nuclear weapons. It should be possible to start a discussion among scientific or political experts as to what that would entail and how a commitment to not increase the number of nuclear weapons could be verified.

That brings me to the group of scientific experts. As some delegates mentioned favourably, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty provides a very good example of a case in which a group of scientific experts worked to develop a series of verification procedures. With nuclear disarmament verification, we should understand that things are somewhat different and perhaps more complicated, because the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty dealt with seismology and its established science, which is not particularly controversial. With nuclear disarmament verification, there is no specific science; it is a multidisciplinary field. So I think that the danger here, which I hope the community will be able to avoid, would be that we unnecessarily limit the scope of the work of the experts to, for instance, active detection technologies. I am sure that the Group of Governmental Experts would be a very good forum for considering questions such as the kind of expertise that the group of scientific experts should have. I think that a broader scope would only benefit the field.

My final point, and I would like to thank Ambassador Gabriëlse for mentioning it, is that the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research project is an example of questions that, in my view, a group of scientific experts could look into. The project, which we implement with the support of the Netherlands, Switzerland and Norway, is looking at the absence of nuclear weapons. The idea is to ask whether we can verify that there are no weapons at a certain facility. This approach is a technique, a tool, and it would be for the political process to see whether this tool could be applied in the real world. With that, I would like to thank you again for giving me this opportunity and I hope you found these points interesting.

The President: I thank Mr. Podvig for his comments. We will now resume our discussion. The next speaker is the distinguished delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ali (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation would like to emphasize how important it is that the thematic debate of the Conference on Disarmament sticks to the rules of procedure and the items on its agenda in terms of title and content, as these are the core priority issues for the work of the Conference. Our delegation does not consider it constructive to select specific topics for thematic discussion without prior approval by the Conference. We hope that this will be taken into account in the Conference's upcoming meetings devoted to the thematic discussion.

Mr. President, I wish to associate myself with the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of 21 by the distinguished representative of Iraq. I would like to add the following as part of the debate on the first item on the Conference's agenda.

The elimination of nuclear weapons is the best way to prevent nuclear war and spare humanity the existential risks posed by the existence of nuclear weapons and their possible use or the threat of their use. The international security environment has, in recent years, seen a decrease in compliance with commitments, a return to placing nuclear weapons at the heart of military doctrines and talk about the possibility of using them again, an accompanying growing tendency to resort to or threaten to use force and attempts to undermine the system of standards and norms established under international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Against that background, achieving nuclear disarmament is of paramount importance if we want to spare the world the dangers that threaten its existence in the event of a nuclear war. In this context, the Syrian Arab Republic attaches great importance to the role of the Conference on Disarmament as the only multilateral negotiating body on disarmament in negotiating a comprehensive nuclear weapons treaty that will ultimately

enable the complete and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific time frame and in a verifiable and controllable manner.

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are two fundamentally interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes. The Syrian Arab Republic therefore stresses the importance of implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and its three pillars, as well as its commitment to achieving nuclear disarmament by moving forward with the implementation of article VI of the Treaty. Syria considers the practice of non-nuclear States participating in operations involving the use of nuclear weapons to be a violation that ought to be covered by articles I and II of the Treaty. It stresses the need to adhere to the balanced and non-selective implementation of article IV of the Treaty, which grants all States parties a firm and inalienable right to have access to technology, conduct research on nuclear energy and produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination.

The total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against their use or the threat of their use. Pending the achievement of the complete elimination of such weapons, the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms the urgent need for the conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument to effectively assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In the context of effective measures to ban nuclear weapons, the top priority is to accelerate the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, in implementation of the Resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference. The continued failure to implement the 1995 resolution, contrary to the decisions made at the relevant NPT Review Conferences, erodes the Treaty's credibility and disrupts the delicate balance among its three pillars. Syria recalls that the indefinite extension of the Treaty is closely linked to the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East. It reiterates the call to put pressure on Israel to accede to the Treaty as a non-nuclear party and compel it to place its nuclear facilities under comprehensive International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 487 of 1981, and General Assembly resolutions, the most recent being resolution 75/33 on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and resolution 75/84 on the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, as well as resolutions of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the NPT Review Conferences.

Mr. President, I would like, in conclusion, to support the point of order raised by the distinguished representative of Iran and stress that there should be no double standards on the part of the presidency and members of the Conference when it comes to using the official names of the members of the Conference and stopping this practice when it occurs.

The President: I thank the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic. The next speaker on my list is the distinguished delegate of Mexico.

Mr. Martínez Ruiz (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I would like, first of all, to congratulate you on assuming the presidency and state our willingness to work with you and your delegation. We also welcome the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Finland, Ms. Kirsti Kauppi, to whom we offer our cooperation in advancing the important disarmament issues on our common agenda. We associate ourselves with the statement read by the delegation of Iraq on behalf of the Group of 21.

Mexico is convinced – as were all the States that adopted the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament – that disarmament and arms limitation, particularly in the nuclear field, are essential in preventing the danger of nuclear war and strengthening international peace and security and in promoting the economic and social advancement of all peoples. Bearing in mind that the nuclear disarmament process affects the vital security interests of every State, all States should actively engage in and contribute to disarmament measures, which play an essential role in maintaining and strengthening international peace and security. All nuclear-weapon States, particularly those with the largest arsenals, have a special responsibility to achieve results in nuclear disarmament.

While we acknowledge that some States have agreed measures to reduce nuclear arsenals and we welcome the renewal of the New START, progress on general and complete disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States, including in compliance with article VI of the

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, has undoubtedly been limited and far from sufficient to meet the high purposes of our collective endeavour. While my delegation recognizes that we live in turbulent times and a divided world, in which new geopolitical challenges are characterized by an increase in traditional and emerging threats, we are also certain that disarmament is not just a fair-weather activity. Effective disarmament facilitates a better security environment by fostering trust between countries. We welcome the recent entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, an instrument that proves that, if the political will exists and if we keep a focus on the terrible humanitarian consequences of any nuclear detonation, substantive negotiations and the adoption of meaningful treaties are possible. The delegation of Mexico is concerned and disappointed that the nuclear-weapon States have recently adopted several policies that reflect a trend towards vertical proliferation and a lack of transparency, accompanied by huge budget increases for the modernization of nuclear arsenals, even in times of pandemic.

These measures do not inspire confidence in the fulfilment of the obligation to prevent an arms race which, previously seen as latent, now seems inevitable and overt. In this context, we regret that the Conference on Disarmament is again convening meetings solely for debate and discussion – even on issues which do not appear on its agenda – instead of complying with its fundamental mandate by opening multilateral negotiations on disarmament. Mexico is concerned at the insistence on simulating substantive work, since it has been demonstrated that deliberative exercises have made no contribution whatsoever to breaking the deadlock in which this forum has remained for more than 20 years.

Mr. President, I would like to make the following comments on the specific issue of nuclear disarmament verification under the mandate provided for in paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 75/40. We appreciate the presence of and the presentation by Mr. Jørn Osmundsen, Special Envoy on Disarmament Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway and Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts to consider the role of verification in advancing nuclear disarmament. We are confident that his guidance will again lead to substantive conclusions. We also acknowledge the interesting presentation made by Mr. Pavel Podvig, which gave us a glimpse of nuclear disarmament verification as not only a technical issue, but one whose important legal and political aspects need to be considered in order to establish a successful regime.

Mexico believes that international verification is a fundamental principle in achieving nuclear disarmament and that, in order to build confidence, it must be accompanied by transparency. Mexico has repeatedly stressed that unilateral, bilateral or regional nuclear arms reduction efforts must be internationally verified. It has also stressed that, within the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, States parties have undertaken to conduct disarmament in accordance with the principles of transparency, verification and irreversibility. Mexican experts participated in the Group of Governmental Experts established pursuant to resolution 71/67, and again in the group of experts established pursuant to resolution 74/50, in a constructive spirit. With regard to the report of the Group of Governmental Experts, Mexico has the following substantive views: the authors analysed the different ways in which verification can be carried out and examined the role that both nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States can play in the verification process; the report also addressed certain concepts and reflected a substantive exchange of views in which all positions were heard. However, while welcoming the adoption of the report by consensus, Mexico regrets that the Group included few women – a situation that the report neglected to mention. Mexico observes that nuclear disarmament verification is a very broad topic that covers both political elements, largely related to confidence-building measures, and technical elements. It considers that the political elements refer to what is expected from verification, while the technical elements refer to how it is carried out. While both must be explored in greater depth, Mexico takes the view that the former should guide the latter.

Regardless of the diversity of views on the approach that should be taken to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons, States should explore verification mechanisms that can contribute to progress on nuclear disarmament. They should propose the creation of the mechanisms that they deem necessary, considering both the legal framework in force and cooperation with existing institutions. With regard to the concept of a group of scientific and technical experts, Mexico considers that this could become a useful tool once there is clarity

or a specific agreement on measures that would provide certainty that all actors are doing their part, firstly, to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world and, secondly, to maintain it and thus guarantee the irreversibility of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. We do not believe that a group of scientific and technical experts should be established without a clear mandate or with a mandate not directly related to those two objectives. In this regard, Mexico believes that it would be highly useful for the group of experts established pursuant to resolution 74/50 to focus its attention, on the one hand, on identifying verification measures that would help to build confidence among States that nuclear disarmament is taking place in a transparent and irreversible manner and, on the other, on identifying measures that might contribute to maintaining a nuclear-weapon-free world, once such weapons have been totally eliminated.

The group would not be expected to make proposals or recommendations of a restrictive or exhaustive nature but rather to provide guidance on how to make progress in developing measures, including agreements that should be negotiated in this Conference, in accordance with its mandate, which can be applied both in the process of working towards “global zero” and in maintaining a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The President: Distinguished colleagues, due to the conditions under which this session is being conducted, we have now to conclude our meeting for today. I would like to thank all our colleagues who took the floor yesterday and today in the thematic discussion on agenda item 1, as well as our panellists. I have still on the list several delegations – namely China, Indonesia, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Australia – who have requested the floor, as well as a request from the United States of America for the right of reply. Although the list of speakers under agenda item 1 has now been closed, the speakers whom I mentioned will have the opportunity to deliver their statements at our next plenary meeting, which will take place on Tuesday, 18 May, at 10 a.m. Thereafter, we will proceed with a thematic discussion on agenda item 2.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.