
Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand seven hundred and fourth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 26 February 2024, at 2.30 p.m.

President: Mr. Febrian A. Ruddyard(Indonesia)



The President: I call to order the 1704th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for participating in the meeting this afternoon. We shall continue with the 2024 high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I invite to the rostrum the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, and I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor.

Mr. Guterres (Secretary-General of the United Nations): Mr. President, Your Excellency Ambassador Febrian Ruddyard, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, this Conference and the bodies that preceded it took shape at a time of maximum global division – the cold war – a moment in human history when, for the first time, we faced the possibility of total annihilation. From the start, this Conference and its predecessors were supposed to be the antidote to the poison of division and diplomatic paralysis that blocked meaningful disarmament. For many years, these bodies played an essential role in drafting the agreements that form the backbone of the global disarmament agenda: the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Conventions on Biological and Chemical Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. These victories for peace were hard-fought and hard-won, but they were not miracles. They happened because countries recognized that the key to disarmament could be found in cooperation for mutual benefit – not competition for mutual destruction.

But we need to face facts. For some time now, this Conference has not been able to function as intended. In fact, this Conference is failing in relation to its very objectives. And this failure is happening as global trust is falling apart, and because of it. Geopolitical divides, relentless arms competition and the erosion of frameworks have created a total deadlock. We are witnessing the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons, and the use of explosive devices in populated areas. Militaries are developing terrifying new applications of new and emerging technologies – including artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons systems.

An arms race in outer space has moved from speculation to real possibility – a prospect with potentially catastrophic consequences. And the nuclear shadow that loomed over humanity last century has returned with a vengeance. The nuclear risk is higher than at any moment since the depths of the cold war. Some statements regularly imply full preparation to unleash nuclear hell – an outrageous threat that the world must condemn with clarity and force. And the vital norms and standards against the proliferation, testing and use of nuclear weapons are being eroded.

In fact, the frustration of a majority of States at the slow pace of disarmament led to the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. I repeat my call to accelerate the implementation of all nuclear disarmament commitments, including under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force. The world must no longer be held hostage by these devices of death.

Excellencies, the great tragedy is that, in the middle of these crises, the failure of this Conference to reach its objectives as intended has contributed to a growing sense of cynicism about multilateral solutions. Indeed, something looks wrong if a disarmament conference leads to no meaningful disarmament, year after year. Humanity needs the Conference on Disarmament to work successfully. The paralysis and deadlock that have come to define it is something that is not acceptable. The Conference must be reformed – urgently. And this is one of several areas of work under the proposed New Agenda for Peace.

The Agenda places the tools of prevention and disarmament at the heart of the global peace and security architecture. It includes new strategies and approaches to deal with the nuclear, chemical, biological and autonomous weapons systems that threaten our future. It recognizes the risks in our technology-driven, digital world, where it is all too easy to weaponize new domains against one another. And it calls for reforming the United Nations bodies and institutions that underpin the global peace, security and disarmament regimes –

from the United Nations Security Council to this very Conference. I commend you for discussing the revitalization of this Conference this week.

We are calling for a new intergovernmental process, under the General Assembly, to develop reforms to disarmament bodies, including the Conference, and we hope this could lead to a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. I look forward to this September's Summit of the Future, when Member States will table their ideas and solutions on the future of our peace efforts and institutions – including this Conference.

(spoke in French)

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I now address all the members of this Conference. I implore you: do not contribute to the cynicism shrouding multilateral action; instead, contribute to solutions that bring us materially closer to a peaceful world. Despite the current diplomatic impasse, the main focus of this Conference remains as essential as ever. Inclusive diplomacy is our most effective disarmament tool. We need this diplomacy urgently, today. You have the power to put it to work and to transform this organization. The United Nations will continue to do its utmost to support this process of reform and change. So let us get to work. Let us strive for a revitalized Conference on Disarmament that can play a constructive role in building a more peaceful and stable world. I thank you.

The President: I thank Mr. António Guterres for his statement. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, please allow me to briefly suspend the meeting to allow the Secretary-General and the Director-General to be escorted from the room.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum His Excellency Anupam Ray, Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Ray (India): Mr. President, it is an honour to address the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament in 2024 under the presidency of Indonesia, a fellow Group of 21 country, and that of Ambassador Ruddyard.

The Conference on Disarmament convenes for its current session in very difficult times. It meets at the intersection of short- and long-term geopolitical stresses that have resulted in conflict and war. It meets amidst uncertainties and frictions arising from the expansion of the spectrum across which coercion can be deployed, from an increasing number of domains of conflict and from the deployment of emerging technologies in warfare. All this takes place as the disarmament and arms control agenda laid out in 1978 by the General Assembly in its first special session on disarmament remains work in progress.

India believes that the current situation validates the importance of a body like the Conference on Disarmament in the global security architecture. Peace can be fragile. The Conference's work of negotiating legally binding instruments that, inter alia, limit weapons and their use, reduce the chances of escalation and restrict means of methods of warfare can contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security. The importance of negotiations, of compromise and of dialogue is more necessary than ever before, to fight off the challenges to our collective security.

Mr. President, India has committed to multilateralism and multilateral institutions and to the ideas of compromise and collective effort that underlie them. India has committed to advancing the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament. India also believes, in the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, that "This is a time for peace and brotherhood, a time to move together, a time to move forward together. We have to overcome the global trust deficit and move forward on human-centric thinking." India had the honour to preside over the proceedings of this Conference immediately before you. Our commitment to the way of peace, to multilateralism, to building trust and to compromise guided our efforts during our presidency.

Mr. President, the Conference has not been able to conduct substantive negotiations on legally binding instruments for a quarter of a century. The reasons, procedural and substantive, for which it has been unable to do so, are understood by all. That does not, however, detract from the determination of most delegations to the Conference to focus on

convergences rather than divergences. The importance of finding common ground to compromise is acknowledged by most Member States. India places on record its appreciation for the flexibility demonstrated by these delegations during its efforts to find compromise during its presidency. We call upon those who have not joined consensus on the programme of work for the current session to demonstrate flexibility and put this Conference back to work.

Mr. President, India attaches high priority to the Conference on Disarmament as the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, as mandated by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and reaffirmed most recently in General Assembly resolution 78/61. We note with appreciation that the Conference was, in 2023, able to resume, under the Hungarian presidency and with the cooperation of all delegations, its practice of adopting a substantive report. We also note that the resolution on the Conference on Disarmament was adopted by consensus in the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly.

India is committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament. We have, through our working paper CD/1816, submitted to the Conference in 2007, called for complete elimination of nuclear weapons through a step-by-step process, underwritten by a universal commitment and an agreed global and non-discriminatory multilateral framework. India reiterates its call to undertake the steps outlined in the working paper, including negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament of a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention.

Without diminishing the priority we attach to disarmament, India supports the immediate commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material cut-off treaty, on the basis of CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. This remains the most suitable basis for negotiations. India, as a responsible nuclear-weapon State, is committed, as per its nuclear doctrine, to maintain credible minimum deterrence, with a posture of no first use and non-use against non-nuclear-weapon States.

Mr. President, prevention of an arms race in outer space is another long-standing item on the Conference on Disarmament's agenda. India looks forward to an early start of negotiations of a legally binding instrument. India has participated constructively in the open-ended working group on reducing space threats in spite of its reservations, which are contained in the relevant records, and will continue to do so. We note that the United Nations Disarmament Commission adopted by consensus a report on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space. We are also engaged with the working group on strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention established pursuant to the Ninth Review Conference of the Convention. India will participate constructively in the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems as it begins its work for the next three years on the basis of a revised mandate. India accords high importance to advancing the work being undertaken on conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons in relevant platforms.

Mr. President, in line with the emphasis placed on promoting expertise and disarmament by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and with a view to empowering our younger generations, India hosts a fully funded, three-week annual disarmament and international security fellowship programme covering an entire range of key disarmament and international security issues. I am pleased to inform you that the fourth edition of the annual fellowship programme was successfully held in New Delhi from 22 January to 9 February 2024, in which young diplomats, including some who are present here, from 24 countries participated.

The President: I thank His Excellency Anupam Ray for his statement. I now invite to the rostrum His Excellency Leopoldo Francisco Sahores, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Sahores (Argentina) (spoke in Spanish): Thank you very much, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to emphasize in this high-level segment that we are currently faced with an extremely complex international context in which the Conference on Disarmament has acquired greater relevance as a multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations.

Argentina is closely following the discussions on matters related to the functioning of the Conference, particularly those concerning negotiations on the adoption of a programme of work. We are grateful to the recent presidencies for their efforts in this regard. We are open to dialogue, reflection and the contribution of any ideas that may lead to innovative proposals in a flexible and tangible manner with the aim of advancing the objectives of multilateral disarmament and arms control, which have been at the very heart of the United Nations since its birth, given that its founding mission is to maintain international peace and security.

Since our last statement in the high-level segment, the crisis facing the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control architecture has continued, with further use of nuclear rhetoric and the strengthening of nuclear arsenals. In this context, transparency and dialogue are more crucial than ever. I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate my country's firm commitment to disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of dual-use technologies.

Mr. President, the priority for Argentina is to advance towards the goal of general and complete nuclear disarmament in an irreversible, verifiable and transparent manner. Furthermore, it is necessary to begin negotiations aimed at creating a committee dedicated to reviewing members' positions on disarmament and negative security assurances. Nuclear-weapon States must provide unequivocal assurances that, pending their total elimination, nuclear weapons will not be used against us.

Looking ahead to the next review cycle, it is regrettable that the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons did not reach a consensus on its recommendations in Vienna in 2023. Having chaired the tenth Review Conference, Argentina is aware of the difficulties involved, but we must continue our efforts to strengthen the disarmament architecture and the commitments of States. Strict respect for the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is a guarantee of sustainable progress based on the pillars of the Treaty.

With this in mind, and on the basis of a nuclear programme that has been in place in Argentina for over seven decades, we renew our commitment to exclusively peaceful uses of nuclear technology. In a world dominated by uncertainty, I want to highlight the historic value of a joint enterprise between Argentina and Brazil. More than 30 years ago, in 1991, we established the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials to verify the peaceful use of atomic energy in our countries through a process of mutual inspections.

Mr. President, I would also like to highlight the importance of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which declared Latin America and the Caribbean to be a nuclear-weapon-free zone. In doing so, the Treaty consolidated our regional position on non-proliferation and disarmament. We hope that the nuclear-weapon States will recognize the principle of negative assurances and withdraw their interpretative declarations to the protocols to the Treaty, which run counter to the object and purpose of that instrument.

Argentina reinforces its commitments in favour of the peaceful use of outer space and against the placement of weapons there, whether in celestial bodies or in orbits, an issue that is taking on increasing importance in the light of ongoing technological developments and on which we must therefore hold substantive discussions. With regard to conventional weapons, Argentina attaches great importance to the Arms Trade Treaty, maintaining its active role in and continued commitment to that instrument, of which it was a co-author. I would also like to point out that Argentina has been and continues to be an advocate for confidence-building and transparency measures in various fields and supports the work carried out to those ends by the Conference.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that the reactivation of the Conference depends on the political will of its members. For as long as we continue to be confronted by challenges to international security, we must demonstrate that the substantive work of this forum can make a tangible contribution to maintaining peace and security.

The President: I thank His Excellency Leopoldo Francisco Sahores for his statement. Distinguished colleagues, please allow me to suspend the meeting in order to allow time for our next distinguished guests to arrive.

The meeting was suspended at 14.50 p.m. and resumed at 15.05 p.m.

The President: Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum His Excellency Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor.

Mr. Amir-Abdollahian (Islamic Republic of Iran) Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to address the Conference on Disarmament on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, and your country, Indonesia, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

(spoke in Farsi, English interpretation provided by the delegation)

Mr. President, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to call for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, the biggest man-made threat to humanity and to our planet Earth. We firmly believe that the integrity and credibility of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons are dependent on the full implementation of all obligations set out therein, including its article VI, according to which all States, primarily the nuclear-weapon States, are under obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects.

The Government of Iran will work tirelessly to mobilize collective political will against nuclear weapons and to strengthen the international norms for nuclear disarmament. This is the only credible way to ensure that the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki do not recur. We also look forward to working with the Conference members during our own presidency, which will begin on 18 March. The long stalemate in the Conference that has prevented it from fulfilling its mandate in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament could be reversed if all the members, principally the nuclear-weapon States, demonstrated political will and lived up to their commitments on nuclear disarmament.

Mr. President, as the largest victim of weapons of mass destruction since the Second World War, and still suffering the wounds of the chemical weapons used by the former Iraqi regime during the 1980-1988 imposed war, the Government of Iran reiterates that the only guarantee against the use of such weapons, particularly nuclear weapons, is their complete, irreversible and verifiable elimination. I would like to reiterate that the war crime committed by the former Iraqi regime in using chemical weapons against the Iranian population will never be subject to a statute of limitations, and the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to pursue the truth and justice for the victims by holding accountable those complicit in those war crimes.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is regrettable that our collective efforts to establish a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East, which was first proposed by Iran in 1974, remains blocked by the United States and its allies as part of their active support for the real source of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the region that is the apartheid regime of Israel. Indeed, the Israeli regime poses the most immediate and present danger not only to the defenceless Palestinians and the Middle East region but to the whole world. The community of nations must take this threat seriously and take decisive action to address the unprecedented danger posed by the occupying apartheid warmongering regime against world peace.

Mr. President, the savagery exposed by the United States-backed apartheid regime over the past four months, a brutal genocide in Gaza where nothing – not innocent children and women, United Nations personnel, journalists, schools or hospitals – has been off-limits, along with armed settlers ravaging the West Bank, demonstrate the extreme level of peril that is pushing the region into an imminent all-out conflict.

The occupying regime has become so emboldened by the western support that it is brazenly threatening the use of nuclear weapons against both Gazans and the countries in the

region. It was no slip of the tongue by one of Netanyahu's cabinet ministers, for instance, who recommended the nuclear option to eliminate Hamas, since there is no such thing as innocence in Gaza. Prior to that, in September 2023, in his statements before the United Nations General Assembly, Netanyahu had talked about a credible nuclear threat against Iran. Under such circumstances, can humanity afford to sit idly by and let a nuclear-capable occupying aggressor so blatantly flout international law by persisting in its genocidal actions against the nation of Palestine and jeopardizing regional peace and security?

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, it is our shared legal and moral commitment to stop genocide and hold the occupying aggressors accountable for the war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity they have committed. In the meantime, the world must recognize that nuclear weapons in the hands of this regime pose the most serious threat to humanity. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to hold the regime accountable for its lawless, malign behaviour and bring all Israel's nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards and verifications mechanisms. I repeat, Israel's nuclear facilities must be brought under the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards and verification mechanisms.

Mr. President, in conclusion, while the international security environment is visibly deteriorating, nuclear disarmament should be seen as a must rather than an option. The Conference on Disarmament is best placed to work towards this legal and moral exercise and we all need to make positive contributions to this goal effectively and constructively.

The President: I thank His Excellency Hossein Amir-Abdollahian for his statement. Distinguished colleagues, please allow me to suspend the meeting in order to allow time for our next distinguished guests to arrive.

The meeting was suspended at 15.15 p.m. and resumed at 15.30 p.m.

The President: Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum His Excellency Gerardo Peñalver Portal, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Peñalver Portal (Cuba) (spoke in Spanish): Mr. President, 78 years after the creation of the United Nations, the aspiration to maintain peace remains an illusion. For clear proof, we need look no further than the genocide being committed against the Palestinian people following decades of illegal occupation, indiscriminate bombing, colonization and apartheid. While development aid commitments remain unfulfilled, millions of people languish in hunger and poverty, and increasingly efficient weapons are built to annihilate human beings, the Conference on Disarmament continues to fail to fulfil its mandate. This is not a deliberative body; we must put rhetoric to one side and engage in substantive negotiations. The impasse in which the Conference finds itself is a direct reflection of the state of the entire disarmament machinery, a situation that favours only the minority. The devastating effects produced by nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki offer irrefutable proof that, as a species, we cannot afford a repeat of those events.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, as the first legally binding instrument to declare such arms illegal in all circumstances, was a milestone in the history of disarmament. The obligations that stem from the Treaty include the prohibition of the development, production, manufacture, transfer, possession and storage of nuclear weapons, and it also establishes the unlawfulness of security doctrines based on so-called nuclear deterrence. We call on the member States of the Conference to accede to the Treaty at once and commit to the total elimination of nuclear weapons in a transparent, irreversible and verifiable manner within specific time frames.

Without further delay, Mr. President, we must open negotiations on a multilateral, non-discriminatory and effectively verifiable treaty to ban the production of all weapons-grade fissile material, including the declaration of all stockpiles and their irreversible elimination within an agreed time frame, and covering the future production of such material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. It is a legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon-possessor States that nuclear-weapon-possessor States provide unequivocal assurances not to use or threaten to use such weapons. We call for efforts

to negotiate and to adopt, as quickly as possible, a universal and legally binding instrument on unconditional negative security assurances.

On the other hand, the use of new technologies in outer space must take into account the need to preserve that zone as a common asset of all humankind. There is an increasingly urgent need to negotiate a legally binding instrument to address this matter. The treaty proposed by China and Russia can provide a balanced starting point for negotiations. The Conference has a clear mandate that must not be diluted with language concealing an unwillingness to take forward disarmament negotiations. Let us work now to build the consensus we urgently need, or history will be the ruthless judge of our inertia.

The President: I thank His Excellency Gerardo Peñalver Portal for his statement. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum Her Excellency Kang Insun, Vice Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Kang Insun (Republic of Korea): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, it is my great pleasure to address the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. It is all the more so as I deliver my remarks right after the distinguished Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, as our two countries just established diplomatic ties 12 days ago. At the same time, I stand here with grave concern as we bear witness to yet another grim chapter of history unfolding in the twenty-first century. Two years ago, Russia launched an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, shattering the very foundation of international peace and security. In particular, Russia's irresponsible actions – such as nuclear blackmailing, the unilateral suspension of the New START, and the decision to withdraw its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty – are indeed major setbacks to global nuclear disarmament efforts.

Mr. President, faced with such a daunting situation, we must renew and reinforce our commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation, to multilateralism. First and foremost, the five permanent members of the Security Council should fulfil their due responsibilities as nuclear-weapon States. The logical starting point would be to fully honour and implement the existing treaties and commitments, such as the New START.

The Republic of Korea also urges the five nuclear-weapon States to actively re-engage in bilateral and multilateral dialogues to ensure transparency and rebuild mutual trust. In this vein, we welcome the recent efforts by the United States and China to resume their bilateral talks on issues related to arms control and non-proliferation at various levels and very much hope that these efforts will translate into meaningful and tangible results. For its part, the Republic of Korea is actively taking part in key initiatives seeking progress on nuclear disarmament such as Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament, the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament, and the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification.

With the firm belief that sustainable peace can be achieved when future generations are involved, the Republic of Korea has been championing youth engagement in global disarmament efforts through a variety of projects with the United Nations, as well as civil society.

Mr. President, the world is now witnessing the advent of a new geopolitical landscape brought on by rapid technological evolution. In today's hyperconnected and data-driven world, gaps in technological prowess and innovation power may impact strategic balance as well. Most notably, artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming every aspect of our lives, including the military domain. Its extensive application and dual-use nature pose both perils and promises in the military. This is why the Republic of Korea, along with the Kingdom of the Netherlands, co-hosted the first Summit on Responsible AI in the Military Domain, or REAIM Summit, last year. The first REAIM Summit raised much-needed global awareness of the pressing nature of the military use of AI and called for action by the international community. We will carry the torch forward by hosting the second REAIM Summit in Seoul this year, on 9 and 10 September. Building on the outcomes of the first summit, the second REAIM Summit aims to enhance global understanding of the benefits and risks of the

application of AI in the military and explore the path to future governance on responsible use of military AI.

Mr. President, coming back to the present, I would like to bring your attention to the most immediate challenge to international peace and security: the unlawful nuclear and missile programmes of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's decades-long obsession with nuclear and missile programmes continues to pose an existential threat to the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has launched more than 100 ballistic missiles over the past couple of years, in blatant violation of multiple Security Council resolutions. It is also worth recalling that it is the only the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that has conducted nuclear tests in the twenty-first century and is brazen enough to boast about them. At any moment of its choosing, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea can conduct yet another nuclear test, which would be its seventh. These unjustifiable provocations imperil what we all aspire to achieve in this very Conference by concluding the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: a world without nuclear weapons. The Republic of Korea, as all others in the international community, urges the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to immediately cease all its provocations, return to dialogue and abandon all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner.

Mr. President and distinguished delegates, at this inflection point of history, we must reaffirm our common commitment to realizing international peace and security through disarmament and arms control measures. In this vein, the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament is of paramount importance. The sobering fact that the Conference on Disarmament has not delivered anything tangible for nearly three decades should not be an excuse for inaction. Rather, it should serve as a wake-up call for us to rekindle our will to negotiate in good faith.

In this regard, the Republic of Korea looks forward to follow-up discussion on the General Assembly resolution on radiological weapons. We also stress the urgent need to commence negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and urge all nuclear-weapon States to declare and uphold a moratorium on fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other explosive devices.

The Republic of Korea stands ready to work together with all the Member States to ensure that the Conference on Disarmament successfully fulfils its mandate once again.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Kang Insun for her statement. I invite to the rostrum Miss Pam Damoff, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Damoff (Canada): Thank you, Mr. President. In 1960, Canada was one of 10 nations tasked with exploring avenues for general and complete disarmament. The conference of the Ten-Nation Committee on Disarmament eventually became the 65-member Conference I have the honour to address today. But the goal remains the same – general and complete disarmament. Our predecessors recognized the urgency to reduce and ultimately eliminate global nuclear arsenals. Thanks to decades of arms control agreements, dialogues and mutual trust, today's nuclear weapons stocks have been reduced to a level not seen since the late 1950s. While we work tirelessly to ensure that this number will continue to decrease, there is cause for concern, including a lack of sustained progress on nuclear disarmament, a rise in risks associated with rapidly evolving technologies, and an increased potential of conventional wars sparking regional conflicts. We call on all States that are expanding their nuclear arsenals to reverse this trend, and we urge all States that have not yet ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to do so without delay.

The global community bears a collective responsibility to protect international peace and security, but malign actors must be held accountable for their role in weakening the disarmament machinery. For two years, Ukraine has endured full-scale war as a result of President Vladimir Putin's illegal and reckless aggression. Russia has further destabilized the disarmament system. It has abused consensus decision-making and rules of procedure in multilateral forums. It has withdrawn from bilateral arms control agreements and revoked its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Russia's blatant and reckless

actions undermine our collective peace and security. We call on Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine, return to the table on the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, begin talks in good faith on a successor treaty, and end its disinformation campaigns.

We call on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to cease its ballistic missile launches, dismantle its illicit nuclear programme, comply with Security Council resolutions and cease its arms transfers to Russia. Iran's unabated escalation of its nuclear programme is a threat to global peace and security. Syria's use of chemical weapons to murder and maim innocent civilians, of which women and girls were disproportionately affected, is abhorrent. We implore all actors to comply with safeguards and conventions, banning these weapons and materials of mass destruction.

The international community must continue to recognize the devastating humanitarian impact of all conflicts and condemn the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons pose their own risk of mass death and destruction and must be addressed with the same urgency.

Finally, we call on the international community to fulfil the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament with renewed energy. We must negotiate disarmament instruments, beginning with the treaty on fissile materials for nuclear weapons. To facilitate negotiations, all States that produce fissile materials for nuclear weapons should declare and implement voluntary moratoriums on production without delay. One nuclear-weapon State, as well as several other States, has yet to do so, despite overwhelming calls for action. Likewise, much more remains to be done to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention, prevent an arms race in outer space, develop a framework for autonomous weapons systems and better regulate conventional weapons to respond to evolving conflicts.

In 1960, my Canadian predecessors stood before the Ten-Nation Committee, stating, "It's easier to point out what we know ought to be done than to find the means of doing it." Now is the time to empower one another to find the means to build a safer and more peaceful world for all. To do so, we must empower young people, women and individuals from all geographic regions to be engaged on issues of disarmament. Canada is committed to working with all members of the Conference of Disarmament to achieve meaningful progress towards this goal.

The President: I thank Miss Pam Damoff for her statement. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I invite to the rostrum Mr. Sun Xiaobo, Director-General of the Department of Arms Control of China. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Sun Xiaobo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Distinguished Ambassador Ruddyard, delegates, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, I would like to congratulate Ambassador Ruddyard on his assumption of the presidency of the Conference. China will do everything possible to support your work and make this high-level segment a success.

Mr. President, more than 30 years after the end of the cold war, the process of global multipolarization has now thoroughly developed and the international strategic security architecture is facing brand new challenges. Protectionism and expanding security agendas are impacting the world economy, and unilateralism and bloc politics are bringing serious harm to the international system. Geopolitical tensions remain high, regional hot spots frequently flare up, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence are rapidly developing and, one after another, new problems and challenges are coming to the fore.

China believes that today's world is undergoing great changes the like of which have not been seen in a century. While the historical trend towards peace, development, cooperation and win-win cooperation is irresistible, the shortfalls in peace, development, security and governance are constantly increasing. The country with the strongest military strength ignores the legitimate security concerns of other countries and is constantly seeking absolute superiority; it has placed itself in breach of contract and has repeatedly broken agreements and withdrawn from treaties; it has abandoned multilateralism and has turned to reliance on exclusive blocs. These negative developments sap mutual trust and cooperation

among the major powers, undermine strategic balance and stability, even leading to global turmoil and instability and a stalemate in the arms control process.

Seven years ago, the President of China, Xi Jinping, delivered a keynote address at the Palais des Nations outlining the basic principles for building a community with a shared future for humankind and presenting our country's views on how to avoid a "lose-lose situation" in the international community. In April 2022, President Xi proposed the Global Security Initiative, which clearly calls for all countries to adhere to a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security concept. China believes that a lose-lose scenario is not a rational choice. Win-win cooperation is the future of humanity. It is only by upholding the concept of a community with a shared future for humankind and promoting an equal and orderly global multipolar system and universal, inclusive economic globalization that we can overcome the security quandary and ultimately achieve win-win results.

Mr. President, historically, the Conference on Disarmament has negotiated and concluded a number of important arms control treaties, which have made important contributions to eliminating the risk of nuclear war and maintaining international peace and security. Faced with the grim international security situation, the Conference on Disarmament should take the initiative to play its due role in maintaining global strategic stability and promoting the arms control process.

First, we must strictly adhere to multilateralism and achieve common security. In the era of globalization, in the face of a complex and severe security situation, no country, big or small, can stand alone. To achieve our own security, we cannot ignore the legitimate security concerns of others. Pursuing absolute security to the detriment of the legitimate security concerns of other countries will only lead to insecurity for oneself. All countries must adhere to genuine multilateralism, respect one another, seek common ground, set aside their differences and advance the multilateral arms control process on the basis of shared security.

From their very beginning, nuclear weapons have always been a sword of Damocles hanging over humankind. The non-nuclear-weapon States' demand to be freed from the threat of nuclear weapons is legitimate and reasonable and an important element in achieving shared security. China has unequivocally and unconditionally undertaken not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States or in nuclear-weapon-free zones. As early as 40 years ago, China proposed in the Conference on Disarmament that an international convention to ensure the security of non-nuclear-weapon States should be negotiated. After lengthy discussions, there is now a broad consensus on the issue of negative security assurances, which are a "low-hanging fruit" and a common expectation of the majority of the non-nuclear-weapon States. The Conference on Disarmament should intensify its efforts to define a road map or timetable for the early conclusion of an international legal instrument on security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States. China calls on the other nuclear-weapon States to respond positively and support the proposal. In addition, China calls on the nuclear-weapon States to sign and ratify the protocols to nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties as soon as possible. China reiterates that it is willing to take the lead in signing the Protocol to the Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and firmly supports the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Secondly, we must maintain the consensus on nuclear disarmament and move the nuclear disarmament process forward. The review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has failed to produce substantive results in the last two review cycles, and the international nuclear disarmament process has stalled. The fundamental reason for this is the attempt by a certain nuclear-weapon State to shift the focus of nuclear disarmament from their own special and primary responsibilities. Moreover, a certain country adheres to a policy of first use of nuclear weapons, constantly strengthens military blocs in the context of "nuclear alliances", engages in "nuclear sharing" and "extended deterrence" with allies and carries out nuclear submarine cooperation, with serious risks of proliferation. These pernicious actions exacerbate the risk of a nuclear arms race and of nuclear conflict, undercut the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, sap the global and regional strategic balance and stability and undermine the nuclear disarmament process.

China considers that the international community should make joint efforts to promote nuclear disarmament and reduce strategic risks. Sixty years ago, China solemnly declared that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time or under any circumstances. China maintains a high degree of stability, consistency and predictability in this policy, which in itself is an important contribution to the international nuclear disarmament process. In the current circumstances, China believes that the countries with the largest nuclear arsenals should continue to fulfil their special and primary responsibility to further substantially reduce their nuclear arsenals and create conditions for other nuclear-weapon States to join the nuclear disarmament process. China calls on the nuclear-weapon States to negotiate and conclude a treaty on the non-first-use of nuclear weapons or to issue a political statement to that effect. States participating in “nuclear sharing” and “extended deterrence” arrangements should effectively reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national and collective security policies and end related outdated arrangements. In early 2022, the leaders of the five nuclear powers issued a Joint Statement on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding an Arms Race, reaffirming that a nuclear war could not be won and must never be fought and that nuclear weapons should not be targeted at each other or at any other country. All States in the Conference on Disarmament should actively work to put the Joint Statement into practice.

Thirdly, we must coordinate development and security and oppose “decoupling and breaking connections”. After the Second World War, the international community established a complete system of treaties to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses are three pillars of equal importance, which should be promoted in a comprehensive and balanced manner to ensure the true realization of the purposes and objectives of the relevant treaties. The existing export control regimes, while emphasizing non-proliferation, also promise not to impede peaceful use and normal trade. However, a certain country applies double standards, deliberately highlighting security threats, weakening peaceful use and even drawing ideological lines in an attempt to transform existing mechanisms into tools for decoupling. This is a complete departure from the original intent of the relevant regimes and undermines international cooperation for non-proliferation.

China has always considered that, while every country has its own security concerns, the safeguarding of its own security cannot undermine the legitimate and reasonable development rights and interests of other countries. To safeguard the legitimate rights of all countries in the peaceful uses of science and technology, China has twice submitted to the General Assembly resolutions entitled “Promoting international cooperation on peaceful uses in the context of international security”, expressing an ardent call of the developing countries. This year, China will once again submit the resolution to the General Assembly. The international community should strengthen cooperation to establish a universal and non-discriminatory non-proliferation and export control order, effectively address global security challenges and ensure that developing countries enjoy the fruits of scientific and technological progress on an equal footing with others.

Fourthly, we must attach importance to formulating international rules to meet emerging scientific and technological challenges. In the face of rapidly emerging technologies and the risks and challenges they pose, the Conference should view and address these new security challenges from a development perspective. In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has developed beyond any expectations, and the security risks it poses cannot be ignored. Last year, China issued the Global AI Governance Initiative, proposing concepts such as “people-centred” and “developing AI for good”, calling for an increase in the representation and voice of developing countries in global AI governance and supporting a major role to be played by the United Nations in such governance.

In the field of cybersecurity, China maintains that, in the framework of the United Nations and based on the Global Initiative on Data Security, international rules on networks and digital data reflecting the wishes and interests of all parties should be drawn up to jointly build a cyberspace community with a shared future. In the field of outer space security, the weaponization of outer space and an arms race are gaining momentum, prompted by the offensive outer space policies of a certain country. The Conference on Disarmament should start negotiations on a relevant legal instrument as soon as possible to fundamentally safeguard peace and tranquillity in outer space.

Fifthly, we must promote compliance in the biological and chemical weapons fields and uphold the authority of the arms control treaty system. We now face a complex biological security situation. All countries should strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, conclude a legally binding protocol as soon as possible and establish a fair and effective verification mechanism to ensure full compliance with the objectives and purpose of the Convention. The complete prohibition and thorough destruction of chemical weapons is the goal and objective of the Chemical Weapons Convention, according to which Japan had to complete the destruction of chemical weapons abandoned in China, by 2012 at the latest. However, the destruction activities have been delayed four times, and less than a quarter of the approximately 400,000 Japanese chemical weapons discovered so far have been destroyed. China urges Japan to scrupulously meet its international obligations, destroy the abandoned chemical weapons as soon as possible and return uncontaminated land to the Chinese people. Additionally, in order to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of terrorists, China supports the development by the Conference on Disarmament of an international convention on combating biological and chemical terrorist attacks.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament is the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, bearing the common aspiration of humankind to beat swords into ploughshares for peaceful purposes. It is essential that all members of the Conference participate equally and universally in it, agree on a programme of work as soon as possible on the basis of mutual respect and start substantive work. In 2022, China, in its capacity in the rotating presidency, worked with other parties to promote the Conference's agreement on an annual programme of work, thus contributing to the revitalization of the Conference. In the new year, China proposes that the Conference should adhere to the following principles in its work: first, we should actively uphold the authority of the Conference; secondly, we should demonstrate the political will to support the work of the Conference; and, third, we must unswervingly adhere to the principle of consensus.

Mr. President, China is committed to the path of peaceful development and will never seek hegemony, engage in expansion or participate in any form of arms race. Its national defence has always focused on meeting its own legitimate security needs and has always strengthened the forces of world peace. China firmly supports the cause of multilateral arms control and appreciates the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to revitalize the disarmament mechanism. We hope that all parties will join hands to effectively safeguard and strengthen the status and role of multilateral disarmament mechanisms such as the Conference on Disarmament. China stands ready to work with all parties to push the Conference on Disarmament to start substantive work at an early date and to make unremitting efforts to build a world of lasting peace and universal security.

The President: I thank Mr. Sun Xiaobo for his statement. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum His Excellency Abiodun Richards Adejola, Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations Office at Geneva. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor.

Mr. Adejola (Nigeria): Mr. President, at the very outset, allow me, on behalf of my delegation, to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the 2024 session of the Conference on Disarmament and to assure you of Nigeria's support in your efforts to facilitate concrete outcomes. Furthermore, let me also seize this opportunity to commend the delegation of India for the enormous commitment demonstrated to addressing the long-standing stalemate on the participation of observers in the work of the Conference on Disarmament this year. The approach adopted by Ambassador Ray and the responsiveness of Member States truly reflected a deepened willingness to move the needle in the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President, we are under challenging circumstances, occasioned by fragmented international relations and rising geopolitical tensions. The needless prioritization of resources on instruments that fuel global conflicts remains a fundamental concern for this body. In this context, allow me to place on record that, in consonance with the expectations and aspirations of my country, Nigeria, we would like to once again reiterate our commitment to pragmatic dialogue on all the agenda items of the Conference on Disarmament, particularly the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, prevention of nuclear war,

prevention of arms race in outer space, transparency in armaments and, most importantly, the effective arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in the absence of complete nuclear disarmament. We are optimistic that constructive dialogue on these key aspects could potentially usher the Conference on Disarmament to a consensus-based outcome at the end of this 2024 session. As a matter of priority, therefore, my delegation wishes to further place on record the need for the Conference on Disarmament to begin to negotiate legally binding agreements on its agenda items and cease from engaging in discussions capable of further derailing the noble mandate of this forum.

Mr. President, cognizant that Nigeria's focus for this 2024 session is anchored on the urgent need for complete nuclear disarmament, our principled position is hinged on the coming into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, to which States in possession of these deadly weapons are yet to accede.

Mr. President, to address the pertinent concerns on the well-being of non-nuclear-weapon States in spite of nuclear weapon proliferation, my delegation wishes to reiterate the need for deepened dialogue on negotiations for a legally binding instrument on negative security assurances to commence without further delay. Moreover, as the world continues to experience erosion of global security architecture and widening asymmetries, concrete dialogue on zones free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction has become a necessity in the onerous race to avert nuclear catastrophe. We therefore urge nuclear-weapon States to accede to the efforts to achieve the objective of these practical confidence-building measures.

Mr. President, it is common knowledge that the highly anticipated tenth Review Conference of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) fell short of any tangible progress. Considering that the build-up to the eleventh Review Conference is expected to continue through the second Preparatory Committee scheduled for July 2024, the future of the NPT remains shrouded in uncertainty. Therefore, the unpredictable tenor of the NPT should signpost the need for Member States to work assiduously to end the long-standing impasse in the Conference on Disarmament, which has lasted for more than two decades. More pointedly, there is no more suitable time than now to achieve this feat, as the doomsday clock continues to tick. The era of rehashed statements without demonstration of political will must come to an end. Member States must demonstrate renewed commitment to embrace constructive dialogue that facilitates meaningful progress in the Conference on Disarmament this year.

Mr. President, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in many ways affected core activities in a number of States and exposed our various national vulnerabilities. Its devastating effects on the social, economic and fiscal well-being of nations are emphatic reminders for States to take very proactive steps to review priorities that deepen human development and security indexes. Against the backdrop, it is evident that the needless prioritization of resources and research, redesign and development of new and highly sophisticated technologies to deliver nuclear weapons payload could potentially lead to another nuclear catastrophe. In this regard, we are again reminded of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as likely consequences of both our actions and inactions.

Finally, Mr. President, distinguished ambassadors and colleagues, my delegation calls on Member States to reflect on the possibilities that abound in the face of global cooperation and respect for the principles of multilateralism. The stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament that has lasted for over two decades is due for a comprehensive overhaul. The general perception of the Conference on Disarmament as an incapable forum of States is long overdue for rebranding. We therefore urge Member States to jettison cold war mindsets and bloc politics if we must safeguard and pursue meaningful progress in the Conference on Disarmament this year.

The President: I thank His Excellency Abiodun Richards Adejola for his statement. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum His Excellency Rachid Bladehane, Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations Office at Geneva. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Bladehane (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, at the outset, I would like to extend to you and to Indonesia my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for its 2024 session, which coincides with the high-level segment. I would also like to assure you of my delegation's support for your efforts to advance the work of the Conference.

We have complete faith that you will do your utmost to foster consensus within the Conference and enable it to play its role and achieve the outcomes to which we all aspire. Despite the great challenges faced, those outcomes remain attainable as long as there is political will, which is essential to the success of disarmament efforts.

The start of the present session of the Conference coincided with the Algeria assuming its position as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the period 2024–2025. In that role, my country attributes particular importance to promoting the values and ideals of dialogue, cooperation and coexistence on which the United Nations was founded in order to maintain international peace and security and help put an end to the armed conflicts and tensions that, regrettably, continue to claim the lives of innocent people by the thousands.

Now more than ever, Algeria calls upon all international actors to strengthen the multilateral approach to the management of international relations in order to overcome the tension that characterizes those relations and to prioritize peaceful and negotiated solutions to conflicts and disputes, rather than resorting to force. My country welcomes the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace and notes the importance of taking heed of the disarmament priorities enshrined in that document.

I turn now to the tragic events that have been taking place in the occupied Palestinian territories for some five months, under the shadow of the continued brutal oppression of the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip, and the inability or failure of the international community and the United Nations system to impose a ceasefire and end this barbaric aggression in order to save the lives of innocent victims. Algeria has worked tirelessly through the United Nations Security Council to convince its international partners to assume their historical responsibilities and to not stand in the way of the Security Council's issuing a resolution calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, which would facilitate the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

As is well known, following extensive consultations within the Security Council, Algeria submitted a draft resolution for a vote during the Security Council meeting held on 20 February 2024, with the aim of securing a ceasefire, in line with the ruling issued by the International Court of Justice regarding the aggression against the Palestinian people. To our great dismay, these urgent humanitarian efforts were obstructed, thereby allowing the occupying power to shamelessly continue to use internationally prohibited weapons against the Palestinian people, in blatant and provocative defiance of the global conscience and the principles of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In this statement, we are keen to amplify the voice of the Palestinian people in order to show that attempts to silence the State of Palestine by denying it observer status within the Conference on Disarmament during its 2024 session have not and will not prevent delegations – especially at this critical juncture – from advocating on behalf of the just Palestinian cause, exposing the racist and barbaric policies of the Israeli occupation, and expressing our support for the principles of transparency and inclusiveness in the work of this Conference.

Mr. President, with regard to my country's position on disarmament issues, Algeria supports efforts to revitalize the mandate of the Conference. To preserve the credibility of this negotiating framework, joint efforts need to be intensified to revitalize the Conference by securing the resumption of its substantive work and the drafting and adoption of legally binding international instruments, especially with regard to nuclear disarmament, which remains a top priority.

Algeria has always been present at the pivotal milestones in the history of disarmament, especially with regard to nuclear disarmament. This began in 1979, when Algeria assumed the presidency of the Committee on Disarmament, which subsequently

became the Conference on Disarmament. Over the years, Algeria has also shouldered other responsibilities with a view to making a constructive contribution to collective efforts in the field of disarmament.

All these contributions testify to my country's firm commitment to strengthening international peace and security, and its firm conviction that nuclear disarmament – which remains a fundamental priority for us, as it does for the overwhelming majority of members of the Conference and of the international community – is the only thing that can save humankind from the existential threat posed by those deadly weapons.

This conviction is reinforced by the experience of Algeria, which has suffered and continues to suffer the grave and catastrophic human and environmental consequences of nuclear tests conducted on its territory during the colonial era. Despite the human suffering inflicted on my country, we have, through our own national efforts, managed to remove all the anti-personnel mines inherited from the colonial occupiers. Operations to clear mined areas were completed in 2017, and full support was provided to all victims and their families, in line with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Despite this achievement, Algeria remains convinced that the noble humanitarian objectives of the Convention cannot be achieved until a world free of anti-personnel mines is established. Out of a sense of solidarity with other affected countries, Algeria has worked to share its pioneering experience in this field, as reflected in the results of the African Regional Seminar on Landmine Action, held by my country on 30 and 31 May 2023, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Algerian independence. Algeria is building on these efforts throughout its term as Chair of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance in 2024.

Mr. President, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the failure to adopt a final document during the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is a great disappointment in view of the urgent need for concrete results to embody the aspirations of the international community. We trust that the next review conference will produce more positive outcomes.

While calling for faster nuclear disarmament, we also underscore the legitimate right of all States to benefit from the peaceful and civilian uses of atomic energy, given its positive consequences for development.

My country believes that the achievement of tangible progress towards negative security assurances through the conclusion of an international legally binding instrument is essential to protect non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons. It must be noted here that, in the context of the brutal oppression of the Palestinian people, serious threats have been made by an official of the Israeli occupation explicitly inciting the use of nuclear weapons against defenceless civilians in occupied Palestine. Such deeply dangerous ideas prompt us to call, once again, for the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

As outer space poses a special challenge to international security, it is in the interests of all to guarantee its peaceful and secure use. While we underscore the importance of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, we believe that standards must be introduced to prevent the placement of weapons in outer space.

Serious thought needs to be given to how to address the risks posed by new technologies, including artificial intelligence and automated weapons systems, and their unregulated use in the military sphere. An international legally binding framework is needed in this area too.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I would like once again to express to you and your country our sincere wishes for the success of your presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank His Excellency Rachid Bladehane Atta for his statement. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, I invite to the rostrum Her Excellency Désirée Schweitzer, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of

Austria to the United Nations Office at Geneva. I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Schweitzer (Austria): Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Austria aligns itself with the European Union statement, but allow me a few words in my national capacity to outline the main priorities in humanitarian disarmament for Austria.

We meet at a time of unprecedented crisis and at a time when many of the multilateral institutions established to foster peace and security, including the Conference on Disarmament here in Geneva, are not delivering on their mandates. We are concerned about the standstill of this Conference that has gone on for over two decades, not allowing this Conference on Disarmament to start negotiations according to its mandate on even one of the urgent issues on the agenda, while geopolitical tensions and mistrust are rising, fuelling arms races from nuclear weapons to new technologies. Equally, we are appalled that this year an unprecedented number of observers to the Conference on Disarmament have been blocked. This contradicts the principles of multilateralism, transparency and inclusivity and harms the work of this Conference and its credibility. Issues of disarmament, peace and security affect us all, and progress on these issues is in all our interest. We should keep the door of the Conference on Disarmament wide open for States and civil society and embrace the interest and input, instead of risking the Conference on Disarmament becoming irrelevant in twenty-first century diplomacy.

Mr. President, in nuclear disarmament, an urgent change of paradigm is needed in a world where nuclear weapons continue to be an existential threat to us all. Their risks and catastrophic humanitarian impact are unacceptable. Nuclear disarmament is not a distant goal in the future, but an immediate priority that needs to be addressed by us, the international community, as a whole. We, together with the clear global majority of States, have done our part to advance long-overdue progress on nuclear disarmament, as required by the Non-Proliferation Treaty, when we adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). On the basis of facts and evidence on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences and inherent risks of nuclear weapons, we put the legitimate security of all humans at the centre of our deliberations, rather than relying on the fragile theory of nuclear deterrence.

We simply cannot know if nuclear deterrence works in any situation, but we know for sure that it can fail. And if it fails, the complex and catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons know no borders and would affect us all. By signing and ratifying the TPNW, States can take a concrete step in strengthening the eroding multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation regime at a time when nuclear risks are higher than in decades.

Indeed, we see an alarming resurgence of nuclear threats which run directly counter to international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as well as a weakening of the nuclear taboo. Let me be clear: in light of the risks and consequences, this is a threat to all of us, indeed to the very survival of humanity. Such constant reckless threats and risk-taking are neither sustainable nor acceptable nor legitimate. The presumed security of a few does not trump the security of all of us. I urge all States to urgently engage in the discussions on humanitarian consequences and risk of nuclear weapons and base our deliberations on the new scientific evidence presented, rather than on unprovable assumptions underlying nuclear deterrence.

Mr. President, autonomous weapons systems are another priority area for Austria, given the profound concerns they raise from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives. Technological development progresses at a fast pace, and the window for prevention is closing. In this regard, we strongly support the joint call by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross of 5 October 2023 on States to act with urgency and establish new prohibitions and restrictions on autonomous weapons system. An overwhelming majority of States have stressed this urgent need for the international community to address the challenges and concerns in the first-ever resolution of the First Committee of the General Assembly on lethal autonomous weapons systems, introduced last year by Austria.

To help international efforts to progress in these discussions, most notably in the framework of the Group of Governmental Experts on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Austria will host a multi-stakeholder international conference, “Humanity at the Crossroads”, on 29 and 30 April in Vienna, and invites all interested stakeholders to participate. The Conference also aims at providing food for thought for contributions of States and other stakeholders to the Secretary-General’s report on lethal autonomous weapons systems mandated by the General Assembly resolution.

Mr. President, we also want to highlight the milestone Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. That is more relevant than ever and needs to be universalized and implemented effectively to make a difference to civilians on the ground. We commend the leadership of Ireland as a depositary and Norway as the host of the first signatory conference, which will be important to review progress and take the work forward in partnership with all relevant stakeholders.

Mr. President, we welcome the Secretary-General’s leadership, particularly on the Our Common Agenda vision report and process, as well as on the Pact for the Future initiative. Austria stands ready to contribute to a strong Pact for the Future and to engage constructively. Our priority continues to be the strengthening of multilateral institutions and effective multilateralism, as a means for a safer and more peaceful world. This also means reinforcing the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime, while adapting it to the speed of innovation and new emerging technologies.

Austria commends all efforts undertaken to revitalize disarmament instruments. But we think discussions on a broader reform would be valuable, to face the immense and long-standing problems. We remain convinced that it is vital to strengthen our institutions, protect established norms, fully implement our treaty obligations and continue to shape the future multilateral disarmament regime. And we call on all States and stakeholders to jointly contribute to this goal. Thank you.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Désirée Schweitzer for her statement. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I invite to the rostrum His Excellency Mr. Andreas Kravik, Deputy Foreign Minister of Norway, and I extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Kravik (Norway): Mr. President, these are difficult times for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Secretary-General’s urgent plea for action should serve as a wake-up call for all of us. Let us use this meeting to reaffirm our commitment to multilateral disarmament and to a world without nuclear weapons.

Norway is deeply concerned about the decades-long deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament. We need a strong political commitment from all Conference on Disarmament Member States to work together and to agree on an effective programme of work. The Conference on Disarmament does not exist in a vacuum, isolated from geopolitical dynamics. Russia’s illegal war against Ukraine and its reckless rhetoric on nuclear weapons do not just represent a threat to regional and global security; the institutional integrity of our common disarmament framework is at stake as well.

The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains the cornerstone of our efforts to promote nuclear disarmament, and we need to make full use of the upcoming session of the Preparatory Committee to strengthen all three pillars of the Treaty. The principles of transparency and accountability must be at the centre of our efforts.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is key to achieving a world without nuclear weapons. Norway and Panama are serving as co-Presidents of the Article XIV conference and are leading efforts to promote the Treaty’s universalization and entry into force. Russia’s decision to withdraw its ratification of the Treaty is deeply regrettable.

Norway is disappointed that the Conference on Disarmament was not able to agree, yet again, to include an explicit reference to a fissile material cut-off treaty in the draft programme of work. We believe that the conditions are ripe for a comprehensive process where all States can freely address their concerns within a framework of negotiation.

The use of artificial intelligence and autonomous technology for military purposes poses serious legal and ethical concerns. We must ensure that weapons systems featuring autonomy remain under meaningful human control. Next week's meetings in the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems will provide an opportunity to make progress towards meeting the urgent need to establish effective norms and rules for the use of these weapons systems.

Mr. President, Norway will continue to give priority to verification and irreversibility in nuclear disarmament. We are seeking to engage all interested countries in this process. This is practical work that we can do now and that will benefit future disarmament agreements.

The lack of a substantive strategic dialogue on arms control is of great concern to us. We urge all nuclear-weapon States to ensure transparency with regard to their arsenals and to establish effective lines of communication, to avoid misunderstandings and accidents. Risk reduction measures should be at the core of our common efforts, not least because of the devastating humanitarian consequences any nuclear detonation, intentional or inadvertent, would have.

Norway is gravely concerned about the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's pattern of ballistic missile tests and the ongoing development of its nuclear programme. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to return immediately to dialogue and to abandon all its nuclear programmes completely, verifiably and irreversibly.

We deeply regret Iran's failure to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve outstanding safeguard issues. Only Iran can provide the necessary clarifications. Iran's decision to withdraw the designation of several experienced Agency inspectors was yet another step in the wrong direction. We call on Iran to resume full cooperation with the IAEA in good faith.

Regarding the precarious situation in the Middle East, Norway continues to call for a sustained and durable humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, and the immediate release of all hostages. International law must be respected and upheld by all parties.

Inclusivity and transparency are key pillars of multilateralism, and the Conference on Disarmament should be no exception. Norway fully supports the inherent right of observer States to participate actively in the Conference on Disarmament, as set out in the rules of procedure.

In closing, I would like to stress the importance of promoting gender equality and broad-based participation in disarmament processes. Thank you.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Andreas Kravik for his statement. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, thank you for your active participation in the meeting. This concludes our business for this afternoon. The next meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place tomorrow morning, Tuesday, 27 February, at 10.00 a.m. in Room XVIII. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.