

Conference on Disarmament

English

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President: Mr. Febrian Ruddyard.....(Indonesia)

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The President: I call to order the 1705th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Distinguished delegates, thank you for participating in the meeting this morning. We shall continue with the 2024 high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Murat Nurtleu, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Nurtleu (Kazakhstan): Thank you, Mr. President. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, it is a pleasure to return to the shore of Lake Geneva and reunite with the Geneva disarmament family. Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Ambassador Ray of India for his energetic efforts during the previous meeting. I congratulate Ambassador Ruddyard of Indonesia on assuming the presidency and assure him of Kazakhstan's full support in carrying out his important duties for the sake of the Conference on Disarmament and our common cause.

Mr. President, as the world's sole multilateral negotiating body for disarmament, this Conference has a special duty to address a set of clear and urgent challenges posed by weapons of mass destruction. However, since the 1996 adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the Conference has been unable to progress on any substantive negotiations. It is crucial to acknowledge the present deadlock that hampers our collective development in the realm of disarmament. The Conference does not exist in a vacuum, as we often say. We have to admit that there has been a steady worsening of the geopolitical situation and the erosion of international norms, more tensions between nuclear States and a serious breakdown in dialogue. Therefore, Kazakhstan joins other delegations today in the clear conviction that the stagnation must be overcome and progress must be made. As President Tokayev, himself a former Secretary-General of our Conference, has repeatedly said, we are firmly committed to the Conference and believe in its value and importance. We cannot simply look away or step back, because the Conference remains a central element of the global machinery that we jointly created to promote a world order based on the Charter of the United Nations, international law and mutual respect.

Distinguished colleagues, let me now turn to some of my country's priorities. First, global nuclear disarmament remains at the top of our foreign policy priorities. On 14 February, my country marked the thirtieth anniversary of its accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Kazakhstan's upcoming chairship of the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the next Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference will aim to strengthen the Treaty's validity and credibility. This task is especially important today, given the growing rivalries and the irrational nuclear rhetoric in the world. Next year, Kazakhstan's delegation will also assume the chair of the third Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We see this dual mandate as a chance to seek convergence between two major disarmament mechanisms.

Second, two thirds of the total United Nations membership are States parties to nuclear-weapon-free zones. In August, we will convene the second meeting of the representatives of all five existing zones in Astana. Furthermore, Kazakhstan, as the only Central Asian member of the Conference, seeks negative security assurances for the Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone. We expect the remaining country to ratify the protocol to the Semipalatinsk Treaty for its entry into force as soon as possible.

Third, Kazakhstan urges all member States to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. We must restrict illegitimate military nuclear programmes and eliminate the threat of nuclear terrorism.

Last but not least, I would like to address the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space. As you know, last year, as the Chair of the 2023 session of the Disarmament Commission, we contributed actively into the adoption of a report on averting the militarization of outer space. Kazakhstan also supports the start of negotiations on a draft treaty to prevent the placement of weapons in outer space.

Distinguished delegates, the Biological Weapons Convention was adopted within these very walls. Unlike the nuclear and chemical regimes, no mechanism or institutions were

created to implement and to reinforce its provisions. For this reason, Kazakhstan is advocating the establishment of an international agency for biological safety.

Dear friends, let us recommit ourselves to the noble cause of disarmament. Kazakhstan stands ready to engage closely with all members of the international community, leveraging our experience and dedication to build a world where the threat of nuclear weapons is but a distant memory. Together we can create a safer, more secure future for all humankind.

The President: I thank His Excellency Murat Nurtleu for this statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Peter Burke, Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence of Ireland. You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. Burke (Ireland): Thank you, President. I am delighted to be here to address the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me to begin by congratulating Ambassador Ruddyard on his assumption of the presidency. I can assure him of my delegation's full cooperation and support during his term. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference and the team for their invaluable support for the work of this important conference.

Mr. President, once again we meet against the backdrop of an increasingly unstable international peace and security context. As Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine enters its third year, the Russian Federation continues to undermine the rules-based international multilateral order. Ireland unequivocally condemns Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Russia must fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognized borders.

The actions of the Russian Federation threaten the entire disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Ireland condemns Russia's increased reliance on nuclear threats and rhetoric in its illegal war. Any use of nuclear weapons would result in devastating humanitarian consequences that would have global impact. Ireland calls on Russia to resume full implementation of the New START. The verified reduction of deployed strategic nuclear arsenals under the New START contributes to international security and to the implementation of article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Furthermore, Russia's announcement of its intention to deploy tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus is a dangerous escalation.

Ireland reiterates its full support for the efforts of the International Atomic Energy Agency to address the nuclear safety and security risks arising from Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Russia's illegal seizure and occupation of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Europe's largest power plant, has created unacceptable risks, threatening the Ukrainian people, the region and the international community as a whole. Russia must adhere to its international obligations, including our collective responsibility to uphold the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture.

Mr. President, Ireland recalls its unequivocal condemnation of the terror attacks launched by Hamas against Israel on and since the 7 October 2023. All hostages held by Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza must be immediately and unconditionally released. Ireland also recalls that international humanitarian law requires that, in any armed conflict, military operations respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Ireland underlines its gravest concern for the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for continued, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and aid to reach those in need through all necessary measures, including through calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. All countries must demand this. There can be no further equivocation.

Mr. President, progress on disarmament is more necessary now than ever. It is regrettable that the working group on further strengthening the NPT review process and the most recent session of the Preparatory Committee for the eleventh NPT Review Conference were prevented from delivering consensus outcomes. The unequivocal undertaking of the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals must be honoured. The obligations and commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation framework, are more essential and urgent than ever before.

Ireland is immensely proud of its long history of championing the Treaty. We call on all States to view the upcoming session of the Preparatory Committee and the review cycle as a critical opportunity to respond collectively to the challenges we face. Ireland will continue to champion progress on disarmament, alongside our key priorities of accountability, gender and humanitarian consequences.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is fully consistent with and complementary to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is an effective legal measure that contributes to the implementation of the crucial disarmament provisions under the NPT. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons also embodies the desire of a growing number of States to re-energize and refocus the debate on nuclear weapons, demanding complete nuclear disarmament.

Ireland is committed to emphasizing and raising awareness of the connection between the NPT and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, as well as its connection with many other important disarmament instruments, including the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and nuclear-weapon-free zones.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the legal instrument most recently negotiated in this Conference – over 27 years ago – established a global norm against nuclear-weapon testing. It is an essential element of the disarmament and non-proliferation framework and a powerful demonstration of what this Conference can and should achieve. Ireland condemns the de-ratification by the Russian Federation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We call on Russia to reverse this course of action and, in the interim, to uphold the moratorium on nuclear weapons testing. Ireland calls on all remaining Annex 2 States to become parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty without delay and without conditions. Ahead of this, we call for strict observance of the global moratorium on nuclear weapons testing.

Mr. President, despite the increasingly concerning security environment, it has been possible to make meaningful progress on disarmament in the past 12 months. In 2023, the international community came together to place a spotlight on the risks associated with lethal autonomous weapons systems through various regional initiatives and the resolution led by Austria, and which Ireland was pleased to co-sponsor, adopted by the First Committee of the General Assembly. We established a new working group under the Biological Weapons Convention to hold focused discussions on the crucial issue of verification for the first time in 20 years. At the second meeting of the States parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, States reaffirmed their commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons and recognized the need for greater understanding of the impact of such weapons, particularly on the climate.

Mr. President, these achievements reflect a strong desire within the international community for real change.

Ireland remains committed to ensuring that all voices are heard in the march forward to progress. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women is essential to achieving more equitable and sustainable outcomes. As co-chair of the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group, Ireland is proud to advance efforts to apply a gender analysis to multilateral disarmament fora, as well as promoting gender equality and improving women's participation.

Inclusiveness is an essential component of a successful multilateral process. Ireland remains deeply concerned that 16 requests from States for observer status in this Conference were blocked. The situation is deeply troubling and brings the effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament further into question. This is a politically motivated challenge which directly contravenes the principle of multilateralism. Similarly, Ireland strongly values the contribution of international organizations and non-governmental organizations to the debate on disarmament. We must protect their participation and facilitate their meaningful engagement in our work.

Mr. President, Ireland remains committed to the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament. We reaffirm its essential role in making substantive progress on our collective commitment to disarmament and achieving a safer, more secure world. The increasingly

procedural nature of its work, the failure to adopt a programme of work and the blocking of requests for observer status is at odds with the need to address the deteriorating international security environment and the desire of the international community for progress.

Ultimately, we must do better. Innovation, inclusiveness, flexibility and genuine political will are essential. You may rest assured that Ireland will do its part, including in its capacity as President, later this year. Ireland will continue to uphold international norms and the disarmament architecture, to speak out against violations of international humanitarian law and international humanitarian rights law and engage with all parties to break the deepening political stalemate.

We can call on all member States to embody the principles of innovation, inclusiveness and multilateralism, working together, as we have done before, to find a path forward. In 2024, it is vital, now more than ever, that we recommit ourselves to the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank His Excellency Peter Burke for his statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Yván Gil Pinto, Minister of People's Power for Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Gil Pinto (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro Moros, we extend warm greetings to the States members of the Conference on Disarmament. Venezuela wishes to reaffirm its firm and unwavering commitment to peace and multilateralism as fundamental pillars for the maintenance of international peace and security. In a context overshadowed by the continuing genocide waged by Israel in the Gaza Strip, where unbridled violence has claimed the lives of nearly 30,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, we continue to witness atrocities committed by the occupying Power that constitute war crimes against humanity that must not go unpunished.

In the political declaration of the Ministerial Committee of the Non-Aligned Movement on Palestine, recently adopted within the framework of the Summit of Heads of State and Government in Kampala, Uganda, we warned of the serious and far-reaching implications of further destabilization of this volatile situation in the absence of accountability and a just solution.

We warned that this grave situation threatens regional and international peace and security and demanded an immediate and complete end to the systematic and violent aggression of acts of colonization and annexation by Israel and its policy of apartheid and human rights abuses against the Palestinian people, including its continued denial and violation of their right to self-determination.

It is regrettable that the United States and Israel have vetoed the participation of Palestine as an observer to this Conference, which is an act that constitutes a discreditable manoeuvre to ignore the fact that the Palestinian State, as a member of the international community, is a State party to various international treaties, including those on disarmament to which Israel is not a party.

Mr. President, this escalation of violence and disregard for human life not only represents a grave violation of human rights and international law, including international humanitarian law, but also raises exponentially the risk of a nuclear catastrophe, given the known weapons and nuclear capabilities of Israel, its willingness to use them and its non-adherence to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We call for the inclusion of Israel in the nuclear non-proliferation regime and its accession to the relevant international treaties. Transparency and commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are essential for mutual trust and global security. Venezuela, in line with the historical position of the Group of 21, firmly supports initiatives aimed at complete disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, understanding that they constitute a direct threat to humanity and life on earth.

Mr. President, in a context in which global geopolitical tensions have led to the proliferation of extremely serious international conflicts, it is increasingly necessary to focus attention on the increasingly grotesque human, social and economic impact of war. The relationship between general and complete disarmament and development acquires greater

dimensions in view of the asymmetry that already exists between the countries possessing weapons technology capable of destroying every vestige of life and the countries that do not possess such instruments, which is profound evidence of the strategic vulnerability of the countries of the global South.

This imbalance demonstrates in practice the true and evil nature of weapons policies based on deterrence and underscores the importance of negative security assurances by which countries with nuclear weapons must pledge not to use them against non-nuclear-weapon States, a crucial issue in the Conference on Disarmament. As if that were not enough, the strategic vulnerability of the global South nations is also manifested in the imposition of barriers to development through the imposition of illegal unilateral coercive measures. These illegitimate actions are intended to undermine economic development and directly affect the welfare and health of the population in countries with emerging economies.

Historically, it has been observed how the induction of economic crises in nations with high growth potential seeks to generate instability in global and regional security. This approach cynically justifies the reinforcement of deterrence policies. Unilateral coercive measures thus emerge as flagrant violations of human rights and international law, directly hindering progress towards disarmament in developing countries. To persist in defining international security through the promotion of military alliances based on deterrence and conflict while imposing embargoes, unilateral coercive measures and sanctions that promote crises at the national and regional levels is immoral and reprehensible.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament, despite its paralysis of almost 30 years, remains the single multilateral forum with a mandate to negotiate disarmament and arms control treaties. It is crucial to highlight the resistance of certain States, mainly those hiding behind the curtain of threat and deterrence, to resume negotiations focused on total nuclear disarmament as the main objective.

Venezuela has repeatedly emphasized the need to maintain the commitment to reinstate negotiations on legally binding agreements on the issues on the agenda. The Conference on Disarmament must not follow the path that will lead it to become a discussion forum without concrete achievements and, on the contrary, it must advance towards significant results beyond prolonged deliberations.

We regret that for the time being no consensus decision has been reached to restart the substantive work of the Conference in 2024. We are confident that under the presidency of Indonesia, progress can be made in this regard. The contemporary security situation confirms the continuing relevance and urgency of the issues on the negotiating agenda of this body, which are as critical now as at the time of their initial inclusion.

With regard to the prevention of an arms race in outer space, my country supports the proposals and initiatives of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, which seek to maintain outer space as an area of peace and for the benefit of all countries, regardless of their degree of economic or scientific development, and without undermining the security of any State. These initiatives are primarily to ensure that space remains a domain dedicated to peaceful and collaborative purposes, free of weaponry and conflict.

The Conference on Disarmament faces an unprecedented challenge but also a unique opportunity to reaffirm its relevance and capacity for action. We cannot allow stagnation to define its legacy; it is time to act decisively. At this critical moment, the Bolivarian Government, faithful to its profoundly humanist vocation, reiterates its support for all initiatives that seek the cessation of violence, respect for the sovereignty of peoples and progress towards a safer and more peaceful world. Lasting peace can only be achieved through dialogue, mutual respect and a firm commitment to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: I thank His Excellency Yván Gil Pinto for his statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Omar Ahmed Karim Berzinji, Foreign Ministry Undersecretary for Multilateral Relations and Legal Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Berzinji (Iraq): *(spoke in Arabic)* Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to join you in this international multilateral forum and would like to congratulate you

on the assumption by you and your country, Indonesia, of the second presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for the 2024 session. I assure you of the full support of the Republic of Iraq for your presidency.

Mr. President, the Conference on Disarmament is becoming increasingly important at this critical juncture, in the light of the growing regional crises and political tensions in the international environment, which exacerbate the risk of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. All these factors jeopardize international and regional stability, especially in the Middle East region, which is witnessing a serious escalation as a result of the attacks by the occupying Power on the civilian population, in flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

The brutal aggression against Gaza City, the attacks on civilians, the refusal to allow the entry of humanitarian and medical aid and the threat of the use of nuclear weapons portend a real catastrophe that calls for a serious effort to ensure an immediate ceasefire, an end to forced displacement, the entry of medical and humanitarian assistance and support for the Palestinian people so that they may fully enjoy their right to self-determination in accordance with international legitimacy.

Mr. President, we would like to stress that the real problem facing the work of the Conference lies in the lack of political will on the part of member States. This requires us to search for ways to achieve consensus on fundamental issues in order to break the stalemate.

Although the Conference has been unable for more than two decades now to fulfil its negotiating mandate in relation to disarmament treaties, it nonetheless retains its status as the sole international negotiating forum for disarmament.

In this context, Iraq, as holder of one of the presidencies of the 2024 session, welcomes all initiatives and activities designed to enable the Conference to carry out its mandate and to reach agreement on the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work that meets the concerns of all member States.

The Iraqi presidency is also determined to make progress in the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments, providing negative security assurances against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons by nuclear-weapon States and strengthening compliance with all international instruments on disarmament and non-proliferation.

At the same time, we appreciate the efforts of the Ambassador of India in presenting a balanced programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament at the first session of 2024. The successful adoption of a programme of work by the Conference is a progressive step towards restoring the credibility of the Conference and multilateralism to achieve international peace and security.

Mr. President, I would like to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Iraq to disarmament and non-proliferation conventions and treaties, as we believe that universal adherence to and universal compliance with the relevant international conventions on weapons of mass destruction without discrimination and the elimination of such weapons are among the fundamental pillars that promote global peace and stability. I would also like to outline the Iraqi point of view with regard to the core issues on the agenda of the Conference, in particular nuclear disarmament.

Iraq shares the position of many States that nuclear disarmament must remain the top priority for the Conference, in accordance with the special status accorded to it in the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 1978. States have an obligation to pursue negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control. The destructive nature of these weapons makes their definitive elimination a necessity for the protection of all humanity. Their continued existence constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Iraq supports any effort or negotiations between the nuclear-weapon States to achieve a serious reduction in the stockpiles of these weapons, leading to a world free of them. The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones will also contribute to strengthening international efforts towards nuclear disarmament.

Iraq also calls for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We call on all remaining parties listed in annex 2 to the Treaty to take the necessary steps to sign and ratify the Treaty.

We also call for progress in negotiating a binding international instrument on negative security assurances under which the nuclear-weapon States would give unconditional assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States that they will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, the continued production of fissile material poses a threat to the achievement of the goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Iraq therefore supports the idea of securing a mandate for the negotiation of a non-discriminatory, multilateral, internationally verifiable and effective treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

As technological progress increases the risk of weaponization of outer space, Iraq shares the view of member States' that outer space is a common heritage of humanity and should be explored solely for peaceful purposes. As its militarization would lead to a costly and destructive arms race, it is vital to prevent any such race. The Conference on Disarmament should consider the possibility of adopting a binding international instrument aimed at preventing the weaponization of outer space. Iraq has supported all initiatives aimed at promoting the peaceful and equitable use of outer space.

Mr. President, Iraq looks forward to the success of the second preparatory session for the eleventh Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, to be held in Geneva in July, in order to overcome the challenges faced in arriving at a final document that meets the concerns of all States, following the failure of the ninth and tenth Review Conferences, which is a serious indication of the challenges facing the disarmament and non-proliferation regimes themselves.

My Government emphasizes that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones is an important step towards the elimination of nuclear weapons and the achievement of genuine security assurances. The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones contributes to both regional and international security and represents an important measure towards promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation at the global level.

The presence of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East remains a major threat in the region. The Middle East region continues to defy international and regional efforts to make it a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Iraq therefore calls once again on the five nuclear-weapon States, particularly the three depositaries of the Treaty, to continue working to support efforts that may lead to tangible results that will genuinely contribute to the creation of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

We also call on the international community to implement the resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, in accordance with the action plan contained in the final document of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, as an essential element in this regard.

My delegation participated actively in the four sessions of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, which were held in New York and chaired in turn by Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Libya. It believed that the Conference would constitute a step towards the adoption of a treaty on the establishment of such a zone and promote parallel procedures with that end in view, in accordance with article VII of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr. President, in order to make progress, we must actively seek new avenues of cooperation. Multilateralism must be the cornerstone of our efforts, with a focus on dialogue, transparency, confidence-building among States and respect for the diverse views and interests of each State to find common ground that respects the development of effective and sustainable disarmament strategies. Furthermore, we must remain vigilant in addressing emerging threats, as the rapid development of technology requires our proactive engagement to prevent the misuse of scientific innovations that could undermine global security.

Mr. President, it is our historic responsibility not to miss the opportunity to resume the work of the Conference in light of the tensions in the current international environment.

We embark on this Conference with a shared commitment to disarmament and recognition of its central role as the sole negotiating forum in disarmament affairs in shaping a safer and more secure world for present and future generations.

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for your efforts and endeavours aimed at restoring the Conference on Disarmament to its true role in addressing disarmament and non-proliferation issues. You can count on the support of Iraq. We wish you success in your endeavours.

The President: I thank His Excellency Omar Ahmed Karim Berzinji for his statement. I now extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Anna Louise Duncan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Duncan (New Zealand): Thank you, Mr. President. I take the floor on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition: Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa and my own country, New Zealand.

We speak today, alarmed at recent international developments that have brought the world closer to nuclear catastrophe. It is not lost on us that we deliver this statement in a forum that is mandated to negotiate nuclear disarmament, but which has been unable to conduct those negotiations or indeed implement a programme of work for almost three decades. We are witnessing explicit and implicit threats of nuclear weapons use, the lack of compliance with the erosion and dismantling of treaty regimes, the risk of the resumption of nuclear testing, the disregard of negative security assurances, nuclear stockpiles expanding and nuclear modernization programmes being rolled out, which point towards an indefinite possession of nuclear weapons.

Each of these developments is heightening the risk of nuclear conflict and undermining confidence in the stability and effectiveness of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, which is centred on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

We are concerned that the salience of nuclear weapons is increasing, plans by the nuclear-weapon States and States under extended nuclear security guarantees to maintain or increase the role of nuclear weapons and security doctrines, including with regard to the placement of nuclear weapons on the territory of non-nuclear-weapon States, is further contributing to the erosion of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

After decades of decline, the global stockpile of operational nuclear warheads appears to be rising once again, according to estimates from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2,000 still remain in a state of high operational alert. The nuclear-weapon States need to demonstrate measurable progress to advance implementation of article VI of the Treaty and its related commitments. Not doing so is further undermining the Treaty. This runs deeper than the failure by all States since 2010 to agree new disarmament commitments, something that we continue to call for as a matter of priority.

Current conflicts, including in the Middle East and Europe, as well as heightened tensions in North-east and South Asia, are detrimental for nuclear international security. These developments make our world more divided and multilateral gains even more difficult to achieve.

Consequently, more States are resorting primarily to individual solutions to safeguard their national security. Taken together, these arrangements only breed more mistrust and insecurity and contribute to the detriment of the international rules-based architecture built over decades to enhance collective security.

We fear that the international community may be sleepwalking into disaster. In the face of this, we urge all States to redouble their commitment to nuclear disarmament across all multilateral fora and instruments, whether that is in the Conference on Disarmament, under the NPT, or under other related instruments such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, the world urgently needs strengthened guardrails and maximum nuclear restraint. All nuclear-weapon States have responsibilities in this regard. The near complete breakdown of long-standing, bilateral disarmament and arms control arrangements between the Russian Federation and the United States remains a particular concern. We encourage both parties to resume negotiations towards additional measures in order to achieve deeper reductions in their nuclear arsenals; actions that weaken the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture and undermine key norms are not conducive to the ongoing dialogue to this end.

Enhanced transparency by the nuclear-weapon States with regard to their nuclear weapons capabilities and implementation of their article VI obligations and related commitments is urgently needed. As recognized by the majority of States parties during the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference, enhanced transparency and accountability would strengthen the review process. Accordingly, we urge all nuclear-weapon States to implement their nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments in a manner that strengthens accountability, that enables States parties to regularly monitor progress and that facilitates the evidence-based evaluation of progress towards the full implementation of article VI. All States that have not yet become parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty must do so as non-nuclear-weapon States without further delay or preconditions.

Mr. President, the longer the nuclear-weapon States rely on arguments that suggest that the strategic context is not conducive to disarmament, the more dangerous that context becomes. History has demonstrated that times of international tension, like ours, are precisely when multilateralism, arms control and nuclear disarmament measures have proven most useful. Nuclear-weapon States need to commit to ending this ever more dangerous state of affairs by fulfilling their disarmament obligations and commitments.

In recent years, new groundbreaking research into the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons has been published. This research clearly shows that nuclear war would be a catastrophe that could potentially cascade all the way up to the collapse of human civilization. This risk will remain so long as nuclear weapons do. The risk of nuclear war is real. Any claims to be able to manage that risk are illusory, not least because they posit a level of control over the many variables that contribute to the risk of nuclear weapons that simply does not exist. Any such claims fail to acknowledge that, at times in the past, it was mere good luck that nuclear use was averted.

The non-nuclear-weapon States have long faithfully implemented their non-proliferation obligations. The nuclear-weapon States must also live up to their end of the grand bargain under the NPT. We expect them to demonstrate the necessary political will to return to negotiations.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Anna Louise Duncan for her statement. I now extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Hanke Bruins Slot, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. You have the floor, Excellency.

Ms. Bruins Slot (Kingdom of the Netherlands): Thank you, Mr. President. Excellencies, we are here together at the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament, a Conference dedicated to making the world a safer place. But the fact is that we are seeing the rapid emergence of disruptive technologies, as well as an increase in violence across the world: Ukraine, the terrible conflict between Israel and Hamas, the ongoing conflicts in Sudan, Yemen and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Another fact is that the Conference on Disarmament is yet again stuck in a deadlock. Once again, it has not been able to reach consensus on effective disarmament measures. And so far it has not agreed on a programme of work for its 2024 session. Therefore, I believe we have a common responsibility and obligation to break the current stalemate. And so I am grateful for the opportunity to address this Conference in its high-level segment today.

The topics discussed here are more pressing today than they have been for many years. The presence here yesterday of the Secretary-General of the United Nations is a clear testament to that. His words underlined what, to me, is one of the most fundamental principles of the United Nations. Together, we must protect the international rules-based order. The Conference can provide key building blocks for that effort. It can bring States closer together.

It can increase mutual understanding. It can take joint steps towards global disarmament and it is our common duty to work to that end.

Besides being confronted with violent conflicts, we are also seeing cracks emerge in the international security architecture. Arms control agreements are under increasing pressure; arms races are emerging in both traditional and new domains; and some signatories of those arms control agreements seem to favour obstruction and destruction over cooperation and progress.

We are seeing a lack of progress in negotiation on crucial instruments. To give just one example, the treaty banning all nuclear test explosions, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, has still not entered into force, even after 27 years. It is high time to turn the moratorium into a Treaty obligation, architecture that could help to reinforce a powerful norm against nuclear testing.

Mr. President, one big challenge we face is the rapid evolution of emerging technologies. It is true that advances in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and cyber technology hold great promise when it comes to economic and social development. And we believe that the responsible development and use of emerging technologies in weapons systems are indispensable for modern armed forces. But those technologies also entail real and imminent risks to security, human rights and fundamental freedoms. They will transform the battlefields of the future. We must develop clear standards for responsible behaviour in this area and we must strengthen the existing norms. The urgency is clear. Take military artificial intelligence. Imagine a war fought between decision makers who are incapable of human fear, decision makers that have no aversion to loss, decision makers that are strangers to human emotion and psychology. Now imagine them operating at superhuman speed with no possibility of human beings able to comprehend what is happening or to intervene. We have a duty to prevent such a future. And fortunately, we are taking steps in that regard. Last year, the Netherlands hosted the Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (REAIM) Summit. Nearly 60 States agreed to issue a joint call to action on the responsible development, deployment and use of artificial intelligence in the military domain. And this was a major step towards establishing norms for military artificial intelligence. As a follow-up, we are forming a global commission on artificial intelligence. And we are grateful that the Republic of Korea has offered to host the second REAIMS Summit later this year.

A closely related issue is the urgent need to regulate lethal autonomous weapons systems. The risk and legal implications of weapons system that take decisions fully outside the scope of human control are obvious. As the current Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, the Netherlands will preside over the discussions in an inclusive and transparent manner. Our national position is clear. Autonomous weapons systems that cannot be used in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, should be explicitly prohibited. And those that can be used in accordance with international law should be regulated. We must ensure human judgment and control with the development of new weapon systems; that should be the main objective of regulation. And in the meantime, I am glad that the United Nations Member States have reached consensus on the sets of norms of responsible State behaviour in cyberspace. Our growing reliance on information and communication technology increases the risk of disruptive, coercive and destabilizing cyber activities. So we need to deepen our common understanding of how international law applies in cyberspace and we have to identify where gaps exist.

Mr. President, arms control and disarmament diplomacy requires determination and courage. And we have an obligation to keep working on this. And we have an obligation to work together. The challenges we face are global. And so our response must be global too.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Hanke Bruins Slot for her statement. I now extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Camille Petit, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor, Excellency.

Ms. Petit (France) (*spoke in French*): Mr. President, ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, I associate myself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and wish to make some remarks in my national capacity.

I realize how important it is to speak in this forum, with which France has such a special relationship. Indeed, the Conference on Disarmament was born in 1978, when former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing expressed the need to create a disarmament negotiating forum that would reflect the international community of the United Nations and be based on the principle of distributing responsibility between geographical poles. This Conference and its predecessors have brought us a number of fundamental instruments: the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. This heritage is now being called into question, and we need to preserve it.

France is aware that we are meeting at a serious time, when many threats are hanging over the security of nations and the smooth functioning of our multilateral system.

First, the armed aggression of Russia against Ukraine. Violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine had already begun in 2014, with the illegal annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbas. For two long years now, Ukraine has been subjected to a war of an intensity not seen on European soil since the Second World War. Two years of indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations. For two years, Russia has wilfully ignored calls from the United Nations General Assembly to cease its illegal war in Ukraine and respect the Charter of the United Nations. For two years, Russia has repeatedly violated the basic principles of international law, refusing to comply with calls from the International Court of Justice by withdrawing its troops from Ukrainian territory.

France firmly condemns the support given to Russia, a permanent member of the Security Council, whether in the form of drones supplied by Iran or ballistic missiles supplied by North Korea, in violation of Security Council resolutions and in defiance of non-proliferation regimes. We also deplore the use by Russia of every possible obstructionist manoeuvre to prevent States from denouncing the war being waged in Ukraine, most recently by denying observer status at the Conference to States members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. You shall not silence those States.

France continues in its unwavering support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. It will also continue to defend, particularly in Europe, our collective security instruments, which are the foundation of the rule-based international order and the security of all of us. Lastly, it will continue to support Ukraine in its efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace, based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We are delighted that a growing number of countries are supporting these efforts.

With regard to the situation in the Middle East, France is extremely concerned by the tragic situation in Gaza and the real risk of a conflagration in the region.

First, as we have already said on numerous occasions, all hostages must be released immediately and unconditionally. This is an absolute priority. France has condemned, unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms, the terrorist attacks perpetrated on 7 October by Hamas and other terrorist groups. We have counted numerous French victims of these attacks: 42 dead, 6 wounded and 3 still held hostage.

Second, it is imperative to act to protect the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. As the President of the French Republic has reminded us, there is an urgent need to conclude, without further delay, a ceasefire agreement that guarantees the protection of all civilians and the massive inflow of emergency aid. The human toll and the humanitarian situation are intolerable and the Israeli operations must stop. Humanitarian aid is urgently needed. France has mobilized, obtaining an unprecedented €1 billion in humanitarian aid, announced at the international conference held in Paris last November, and is providing support on the ground.

France will continue to make every effort in favour of a two-State solution, which presupposes the creation of a Palestinian State, the only solution capable of meeting the security needs of both Israel and the Palestinian people. Lastly, it is working to avoid a regional escalation and to prevent the conflict from spreading, particularly to Lebanon and the Red Sea.

France is determined that this forum should be able to fulfil its mandate to negotiate disarmament instruments. Last year, together with Germany and with the help of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, we initiated a process of reflection on how to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament. We intend to continue this work over the long term to overcome all attempts at obstructionism and restore the confidence needed to launch negotiations.

France is thus promoting a concrete and realistic disarmament programme, as defined by the French President. This programme includes ensuring compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime, and reaffirming its primacy and centrality. It also consists of launching, within the Conference on Disarmament and on the basis of the negotiating mandate adopted by it, negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices and, in the meantime, applying a moratorium in this respect. Lastly, it involves enabling the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which, I would remind you, was negotiated by this Conference.

I would also like to emphasize the need to continue efforts to reduce the world's largest stockpiles of nuclear arsenals. France reiterates its commitment to the New START Treaty and supports the negotiation of a successor treaty. We call on Russia to accept the proposal of the United States for dialogue. It is also essential that China should make the required efforts in terms of transparency concerning its nuclear arsenals and doctrine, and the control of its arsenals.

France is concerned about attacks on the non-proliferation regime established by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Iran must put an end to its nuclear escalation, which has no credible civilian justification, urgently return to compliance with its obligations under the comprehensive safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and cooperate fully with the Agency. North Korea must comply with all its obligations to achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling of its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

In addition, France constructively supports all initiatives that could lead to further effective measures and disarmament instruments. This is the case when it comes to cyberspace, where it defends the application of international law and promotes the application of the norms of responsible State behaviour adopted by consensus in 2015. To support States in implementing this normative framework, the General Assembly decided by a very large majority to establish a permanent, inclusive and action-oriented cybersecurity mechanism within the United Nations, by 2026 at the latest. As part of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, we are working actively with all States to turn the “cyber action programme” into reality.

This is also the case in outer space, a growing challenge for the security of all countries, whether or not they are so-called “space Powers”. The development of standards of responsible behaviour is the most pragmatic and effective approach to improving space safety and security and to preparing and supporting the negotiation of legally binding instruments in this field. For these reasons, France will fully support the forthcoming work of the open-ended working group on principles of responsible behaviour, and is already committed, on a national basis, to ensuring the continuity of work within the Group of Governmental Experts on Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. Of course, strict compliance with existing treaties, in particular the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, is also an essential prerequisite for establishing the climate of confidence needed to adopt new measures.

This is also the case for lethal autonomous weapon systems, an area in which France, alongside other States, is defending a dual approach to identifying measures to meet the challenges posed by these systems, with the aim of ensuring that their development and use comply with international humanitarian law. France will continue to support the work being carried out by the new Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems, and to encourage concrete progress before 2026.

More broadly, France has taken full measure of the stakes involved in the progress of artificial intelligence in the military field and has adopted a road map designed to enable the armed forces to rely on trusted, controlled and responsible artificial intelligence. Its diplomatic action is guided by this objective. We will continue to contribute constructively to the debates taking place in this and other relevant forums.

Mr. President, you can count on the commitment of France to defend not only the smooth running of this forum but also its inclusive nature. France will support your efforts to draw up a programme of work and will play an active part in the discussions organized by the various presidencies this year.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Camille Petit for her statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Thomas Göbel, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Göbel (Germany): Thank you, Mr. President. Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, Germany is actively engaged in working towards multilateralism and a world governed by international law and the Charter of the United Nations, a world in which shared principles and norms guide relations between sovereign nations, and disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation architecture that makes us more secure.

International relations cannot be guided by brute force or the law of the strongest. These goals have come under huge strain because of Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. Russia has weakened nuclear arms control by suspending the New START and defying arms control talks with the United States – despite the repeated United States offers to conduct those talks without preconditions – by de-ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. By withdrawing from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, it also blocked consensus in a number of key non-proliferation and arms control fora. On top of this, Russia works against inclusivity in international non-proliferation and disarmament fora by preventing observer States from attending the Conference on Disarmament and by blocking increased participation of non-governmental organizations.

Mr. President, on 7 October, Israel fell victim to an unprecedented terrorist attack carried out by Hamas. Hamas committed unspeakable atrocities, including systematic sexual violence. For Germany, Israel's security is not negotiable, Israel has the right to defend itself against armed attacks. It must exercise its right to self-defence in line with international humanitarian law, with all necessary consideration for the protection of civilian life. We are extremely concerned by the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The suffering on all sides is hard to bear. We work continuously to explore all possible options to get more humanitarian assistance into Gaza to alleviate the terrible suffering of civilians. Therefore, Germany has called and continues to call for an urgent humanitarian pause, paving the way to lasting peace.

Mr. President, in a world like this, it becomes very obvious that peaceful international relations, multilateralism and international security can only be guaranteed if every country abides by the rules and principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. This includes respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the political independence of all countries. That is why, complementing necessary deterrence and defence, we remain committed to progress on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Together with many partners who will continue to advocate for concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament, in particular in the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament and the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative. We call urgently for the start of negotiations of a fissile material cut-off treaty and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, despite the odds.

Moreover, Germany has started to support concrete projects on victim assistance and environmental remediation from the long-term damages of nuclear testing, working together with our civil society partners. Pending a future fissile material cut-off treaty coming into force, we continue to call on nuclear-weapon States who have already declared a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons to uphold it, and on China to finally declare such a moratorium. We will continue to work with our partners to make sure that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful and that the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea abandons its nuclear weapons, existing nuclear programmes and any other weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. We remain strongly committed to upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons and to fight their re-emergence. We are committed to strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention in order to address persisting and newly emerging threats stemming from both State and non-State actors.

Germany remains firmly committed to the sustainable and peaceful use of outer space and to the overarching objective of the proposed instrument on the prevention of an arms race in outer space, including through norms of responsible State behaviours. Enhancing space security is paramount for all States, be they spacefaring nations or not.

Mr. President, our Conference, the Conference on Disarmament, has certainly seen better days. In fact, it has not been able to fulfil its mandate for many years now and the current geopolitical situation certainly does not contribute to overcoming the deadlock. Yet we cannot simply resign in view of this challenge. Rather, we should explore new ways to make better use of this body's potential and resources. This was at the very heart of the revitalization efforts that France and Germany launched last year under their respective Conference on Disarmament presidencies, with the support of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). We are glad to see that first steps in this regard have already been implemented, including linking the Conference more closely to other disarmament processes. The channels for communication that the Conference on Disarmament offers are even more important in a global context with conflicting security interests. We have to make the most out of the existing platform, building on the positive experiences of the past, when we conducted substantive discussions on the core agenda items of this forum. The work of the Indian presidency has brought us very close to such a result, and we can only encourage you, Mr. President, to pursue the efforts in this direction.

Let us not forget that a decision on a programme of work on the establishment of subsidiary bodies would present just the starting point of our work, not the result. Be it preparatory discussions – or, one day, hopefully, negotiations – on legally binding agreements, the areas of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation touch the vital security interests of all States. Therefore the Conference on Disarmament has to be inclusive, allowing all United Nations Member States to participate in its deliberations. The rejection of 16 observer requests, 14 by the Russian Federation alone for purely political reasons, is a major blow to our work.

Mr. President, by making progress on humanitarian arms control, we can protect millions of lives. Anti-personnel mines cause wounds and bleeding to bodies and souls for generations. That is why Germany pushes for a world free of anti-personnel mines. Likewise, we continue to support and strengthen other conventional arms control instruments, including the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Programme of Action on Small Arms. Germany was also at the forefront of efforts to create a new global framework that will address existing gaps in through-life ammunition management. We recall the General Assembly resolution that we tabled together with France, which received broad support. The devastating and often long-term impact on civilians of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas remains a grave concern. Obligations under international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles must be fully respected when using explosive weapons in order to minimize civilian harm. Germany has supported efforts culminating in the successful negotiation of the Political Declaration on Strengthening the Protection of Civilians from the Humanitarian Consequences Arising from the Use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas from the very beginning and calls on all States to endorse the Declaration. We are committed to actively engaging in the follow-up process and hope to see many more supporters during the first international follow-up conference in Oslo in April this year.

Mr. President, new technologies provide opportunities for armed forces, but they also pose challenges for disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Currently, these are areas with often insufficient rules and a multitude of actors, with free availability and blurred boundaries between civilian and military use. Together we need to search for approaches that help to build more security. Germany is very actively engaged in the processes of creating norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour, including by supporting important initiatives on outer space and laws.

Mr. President, since 2023, Germany has been following guidelines for a feminist foreign policy. We aim to strengthen the rights, resources and representation of women and marginalized groups in, among others, peace and security policy, which also includes our approach to arms control and disarmament.

To conclude, international peace and security can only exist in a world order that is based on international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the sovereign equality of all States. Germany remains convinced that there can be no sustainable peace and security in the long term without arms control, disarmament and the preservation of the non-proliferation regime. These are key pillars of the international order that we must defend today more staunchly than ever. We must protect them so that they can protect us.

The President: I thank His Excellency Thomas Göbel for his statement. The Conference will now hear an address by Her Excellency Luminița Odobescu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania, in a pre-recorded video.

Ms. Odobescu (Romania) (in a pre-recorded video statement): As we hold this high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament, the geopolitical backdrop is deeply worrying. We have just marked two years since Russia's full-scale illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. We will not tire of strongly condemning the unprovoked and unjustified attacks on Ukrainian civilians and the country's infrastructure. Romania reiterates its firm support for Ukraine and will continue to do so as long as it takes. Russia is not only waging a war of aggression against a peaceful country, blatantly disregarding the rules-based international order, but is also pursuing a reckless nuclear rhetoric. It poses a clear threat to the current international security architecture and it erodes trust in multilateral institutions, which are essential for peace and security.

Mr. President, Romania reaffirms its continued support for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as the cornerstone of the global nuclear, non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. It is our shared responsibility to ensure that the Treaty will continue to stand the test of time. The States parties have to look for further means to strengthen the framework of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. We need to make progress on confidence-building transparency, nuclear risk reduction measures and verification. We deplore the unprecedented decision of Russia to revoke its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and we renew our support for the entry into force and universalization of this Treaty.

By the same token, the negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty have to start. One of the major concerns is the unprecedented pace of North Korean ballistic missile launches, violating multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. North Korea is also exporting arms to Russia, thus supporting that country's aggression against Ukraine. We also highlight Iran's deeply worrying advance in its nuclear programme, as well as its enhanced military cooperation with Russia. Iran provides Russia with capabilities used for attacking Ukraine.

Romania sees value in pursuing discussion on improving the uncontrolled disarmament and non-proliferation regime, both in formal and in informal formats. Thus, we will be hosting one of this year's meetings to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. We need to also look attentively at the emerging challenges posed by new technologies, such as the use of artificial intelligence in the military domain or cybersecurity. Furthermore, Romania supports the development of norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour in outer space, as this voluntary framework would benefit all countries alike, irrespective of space firing capabilities. It is also paramount that the work of the Conference should move forward, for example on beginning negotiations on a legally binding agreement to prohibit State use of radiological weapons, an initiative we fully support.

Mr. President, we deeply regret Russia's politically driven objection, right from the outset of this year's Conference on Disarmament, to the granting of observer status to certain Member States of the United Nations. Romania supports multilateralism as the way forward for enhanced global security. We can make progress through constructive dialogue and close cooperation among all genuinely interested States.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Luminița Odobescu for her statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Leonardo Bencini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Bencini (Italy): Mr. President, Excellencies, Italy remains deeply concerned at the deteriorating security environment and the gradual erosion of the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control architecture. Yesterday, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Gutierrez, reminded us in this room of the need to implement the original mandate of this Conference and to end the paralysis in which it has been for far too long. Italy has always been a staunch supporter of the multilateral system and stands ready to preserve and strengthen this architecture, including by revitalizing or reforming the Conference on Disarmament so that it can go back to fulfilling its original negotiating mandate.

Italy continues to condemn in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, now in its third year. This aggression must stop immediately and Russia must withdraw from all illegally occupied territories in Ukraine. We are also increasingly concerned about Moscow's attempts to obstruct the participation of international organizations and United Nations Member States in various disarmament fora. In this context, we strongly deplore the misuse by the Russian Federation of the consensus rule as a veto to block the granting of observer status in this Conference to 14 European Union Member States and candidate countries. Excluding an entire region from this body is unprecedented and constitutes an unwarranted attack on the principle of inclusivity and dialogue.

Mr. President, Italy shares the goal of a peaceful and secure world completely free of nuclear weapons, in line with article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. At the same time, we have to recognize that, in spite of non-proliferation efforts, the global threat from the spread of nuclear weapons remains very real. Italy urges Iran to return to the full implementation of all its obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. We also call on Iran to cooperate fully and transparently with the International Atomic Energy Agency. We are seriously concerned about the irresponsible behaviour of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which today represents a serious threat to international peace and security. We urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from further provocation and to take concrete steps towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization.

Yesterday we heard from the Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, Robert Floyd, how important and effective the international monitoring system is. As a staunch supporter of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and former co-coordinator of the Article XIV Conference, Italy urges all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay.

After more than 30 years since the first United Nations resolution on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices was adopted, it is time to break this deadlock and start negotiating this treaty. We understand the concerns of some delegations on this particular question, but we believe there could be ways to take those concerns into consideration. Starting negotiations does not in itself prejudice their outcome. There should be a certain level of flexibility that would allow us to move forward while, at the same time, safeguarding the legitimate interest of any given Member State. We believe there is an urgent need to improve space security in an increasingly congested, contested and competitive outer space environment. We are ready to continue working with all interested parties to reduce space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour.

The President: I thank His Excellency Mr. Leonardo Bencini for his statement. The Conference will now hear an address by His Excellency Frederick M. Shava, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Zimbabwe, in a pre-recorded video.

Mr. Shava (Zimbabwe) (in a pre-recorded video statement): Whilst we are grateful that we have observers this year, Zimbabwe is, however, appalled that, in these contemporary times, a Member State of the United Nations can still be denied observer status on political grounds. This is against the spirit of inclusivity and transparency that are synonymous with

this Conference. Inclusivity and transparency are better achieved if Members States of the United Nations are willing to work on peace and do so without any discrimination.

From the onset, Mr. President, let me add Zimbabwe's dismay and grave concerns in respect of the horrendous and tragic developments, civilian deaths and destruction taking place in Gaza. Zimbabwe condemns the collective punishment meted out to the Palestinian people in breach of international law. We call for an immediate ceasefire and for urgent action to allow the distribution of much needed humanitarian support. Zimbabwe continues to advocate for a two-State solution as a permanent solution to this conflict.

Mr. President, we meet once again at a time of heightened global geopolitical insecurity. We face extraordinary risks from artificial intelligence, biological threats, nuclear weapons, climate change, cyber weapons, a fragile global economic situation and contestation in outer space. These risks have exposed our lack of common purpose, geostrategic competition and most importantly, the shortcomings of the existing governance frameworks.

Achieving peace in a world fraught with these interlocking threats demands that we find new ways to act collectively and cooperatively. Such action can only happen if we invigorate the multilateral framework so that it can deal with current and future risks. We need a multilateral system that we identify with and have trust in. Zimbabwe looks forward to the Summit of the Future as we work for a better tomorrow.

In the same context, we also welcome the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace and his vision on how to address the multifaceted challenges facing the world today. This provides an opportunity for Member States to reflect on their commitment to uphold and strengthen the multilateral system. Indeed, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation form a central pillar in the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, leading to a better world. We pledge our active participation and involvement in the discussions seeking to repair the broken systems governing international peace and security.

Mr. President, Zimbabwe is concerned by the continued deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament. A glaring symptom of this deadlock is the regrettable failure by the Conference to agree on a programme of work for consecutive years. Agreeing on a programme of work requires all parties to work together in unison when required, to set political differences aside. This situation illustrates the urgent need for a revitalized Conference on Disarmament. A revitalized Conference on Disarmament should play a pivotal role in the advancing of the disarmament agenda and taking its place as the sole multilateral disarmament and negotiating forum.

Equally important, Mr. President, and linked to the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament is the imperative need to rebuild trust in the consolidation of the existing disarmament architecture and in creating an effective global security system. We insist that a robust collective security system rests on the full realization by member States that they bear responsibility for the shared goals of achieving global peace. They should necessarily review their divergent views and negotiate in a constructive spirit underpinned by the principle of the sovereign equality of States. Exploring our common ground, showing flexibility, and having the political will to compromise should be the hallmarks and guiding principles of the Conference.

Mr. President, Zimbabwe is an advocate of the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of the use of nuclear weapons. We support the calls 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, pending the achievement of the complete elimination of such weapons.

As one of the pioneering signatories to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, the Treaty of Pelindaba, Zimbabwe fully supports the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in all the regions of the world, as this constitutes an important measure in achieving nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I want to call on all of us to remember that our choices today will lead to either a breakthrough or further breakdown in our quest to maintain international peace and security.

The President: I think His Excellency Frederick Shava for his statement. I now extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Naledi Pandor, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of South Africa. You have the floor, Excellency.

Ms. Pandor (South Africa): Mr. President, thank you for this opportunity to make a statement on behalf of South Africa. Nuclear threats continue to focus attention on the potential use of nuclear weapons and its ensuing humanitarian impacts. We believe that no State should think that it is entitled to possess weapons that pose such a grave and existential threat to humanity. We need to repeat often when addressing the issue of nuclear weapons that it is not strategic stability among nuclear-weapon States that is paramount, but rather understanding and knowledge of the catastrophic consequences that any use of nuclear weapons would inflict on all peoples and the environment. It is imperative that we finally remove the threat of nuclear weapons through their total elimination. We therefore call upon all States possessing nuclear weapons to make the right choice to urgently work towards the total elimination of these inhumane weapons. We further call on other States under the nuclear umbrella and those that are part of nuclear alliances to refrain from giving value to these weapons. Such actions only serve to encourage proliferation and bring about increased insecurity for all.

As I say this, Mr. President, on behalf of South Africa, I am extremely concerned at the grave geopolitical situation and growing global insecurity and instability, which I believe all of us, as Member States of the United Nations, should address urgently. We require collective multilateral decisions that will demonstrate the importance of global governance and respect for an adherence to international law. International security can never be achieved by a few States acting alone. There is a necessity for the international community to work together on these shared challenges.

This underscores the need for the Conference on Disarmament to overcome the current impasse and to take the urgent action that is needed to commence its substantive work in the field of disarmament. The Conference and its predecessors have in the past negotiated major multilateral arms limitation and disarmament agreements, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. While the international security environment adds challenges to our work in this Conference on Disarmament, it must be noted that some of these instruments were adopted at the height of the cold war and they illustrate what is possible when we, the member States of this Conference, work together in the collective interest of all humanity.

Collectively, the member States of the Conference hold the key to unlocking this body's true potential and purpose. The key challenge that we face, as always, is the absence of political will. My delegation regrets that the Conference this year, once again, will probably not be able to find consensus on its programme of work. Our appeal, as South Africa today, is to all members of this body to show mature flexibility and to work constructively towards the adoption of a programme of work which would allow the Conference to execute its mandate.

There are items on the agenda of the Conference on which substantive negotiations might commence. These include, for instance, the matters of a fissile material cut-off treaty, a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space or the development of other effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. Some of these treaties are long overdue, and further delays will only contribute to an arms race and create new areas of conflict. Just the act of negotiation can also help to rebuild trust among States, and that is something that I believe is sorely needed, having listened to all our various national contributions yesterday in the high-level segment. We are sorely divided and in need of unity.

Mr. President, disarmament measures affect the vital security interests of all States. Accordingly, all States must have the opportunity to be actively engaged with and contribute to disarmament efforts. We were concerned when the Conference was not able to reach agreement regarding granting some non-member States the status of observers in the 2024 session of the Conference. I want to reiterate my country's commitment to ensuring inclusiveness through the participation of all interested States in the work of the Conference. This would reaffirm the importance of multilateralism and the principle of inclusivity in the

work of this Conference on Disarmament. I think the Conference needs to urgently review the question of the expansion of its membership to ensure greater representativity and more relevance in the current context. I note that many countries, even on our own continent of Africa, are showing a renewed interest in the use of nuclear power as a weapon, and we need to pause these ambitions because they pose a real danger to the world.

Mr. President, I conclude by asserting that common threats can only be effectively addressed through enhanced international cooperation and strong international institutions that can respond to our collective security concerns. We are all bound by our collective commitment to advance substantive negotiations on priority issues of disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament. I wish to repeat that the deteriorating international security environment in which we find ourselves can be dealt with through the disarmament structures that currently exist. Addressing the challenges will ensure peace and security for all, resulting in increased prosperity and development. I hope that part of the lessons of this session of the high-level segment and other meetings will be that we will be able, together, to agree that we should commit to global peace and security and to working together to get the world back to focus on what our work should be, which is addressing the needs and interests of the most vulnerable and marginalized in our world.

The President: I thank Her Excellency Naledi Pandor for her statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. You have the floor, Minister.

Mr. Mirzoyan (Republic of Armenia): Honourable President, Honourable Secretary-General of the Conference, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, it is a pleasure to address the Conference on Disarmament in our capacity as an observer State. We believe that the Conference on Disarmament serves as a crucial platform for dialogue and collaboration among nations aiming to build trust and understanding in pursuit of common goals. Armenia, as an observer State, is eager to actively engage in the deliberations, discussions and initiatives aimed at advancing disarmament efforts on a global scale. We reaffirm our strong commitment to the universal implementation of international obligations in the areas of arms control and non-proliferation, and offer our steadfast support to the institutions that underpin it.

Armenia reiterates its firm support for the full, complete and effective implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. As a strong supporter of the non-proliferation policies, we reiterate our full compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards agreements and their additional protocol. Furthermore, we consider the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to be an indispensable pillar and tool for the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and disarmament. New international regulatory instruments, or mechanisms for addressing twenty-first century threats and challenges are crucial for preventing potential conflicts and saving lives, in line with the international humanitarian law and international human rights law. In this regard, it is our strong conviction that our joint efforts should be directed not just at protecting and advancing what we have already achieved, but at matching the rapid technological progress, especially in artificial intelligence, lethal autonomous weapons systems or drone technologies.

Mr. President, Armenia is all too familiar with the devastating impact of armed conflict, having experienced the tragic consequences of wars in our recent history. This painful past motivates us to advocate persistently for peaceful resolution of conflict, prevention of the use or threat of force, uncontrolled and mass acquisition of weaponry and disarmament.

The erosion of the arms control regimes does not happen in a vacuum. It is usually a consequence of long years of non-compliance with the main treaties and documents, as well as neglect of such crucial principles of the Charter of the United Nations as the non-use of force or threat of use of force and the maintenance of international peace and security and good neighbourly relations. International failure to identify early warning signs of such violations leads to bloody conflicts and hostility. It is in such an environment that Azerbaijan launched a violent war against Nagorno Karabakh in 2020, infiltrated Armenian sovereign territory and, on 19 September last year, conducted the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Armenian population, numbering over 108,000, from its ancestral homeland. Overall, the

security environment in the South Caucasus remains volatile, as Azerbaijan has not renounced its aggressive policy against the Republic of Armenia. It continues to present new territorial claims against the Republic of Armenia, alongside backtracking from previously agreed principles for the establishment of peace and security in our region, particularly the principle of respecting each other's territorial integrity based on the Almaty Declaration of 1991 and conducting a delimitation process to recover the borderline of 1991. These principles have been consistently rejected by Azerbaijan.

Nevertheless, the Government of Armenia continues its genuine efforts to build peace and stability in our region, as well as confidence and trust between Armenia and Azerbaijan. To that end, we have proposed the simultaneous withdrawal of troops from the Armenia-Azerbaijan inter-State border, with the further demilitarization of the bordering areas. Armenia also proposes that a bilateral arms control mechanism and non-aggression pact be signed ahead of the peace treaty, in case the signing of that document requires additional time to reach a consensus. Despite the fact that all these proposals have so far been ignored or rejected by Azerbaijan, we are determined to continue our efforts.

Distinguished colleagues, the arms control and non-proliferation architecture were established with the objective of ensuring a safer and more secure life for all. It cannot be accomplished without joint efforts, compromise and political will. We firmly believe that dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect are the cornerstones of effective disarmament efforts. Armenia stands ready to work cooperatively with many States, sharing experiences, expertise and resources to address the complex challenges that are ahead of us. Through open communication and the commitment to finding common ground, we can pave a way to a more secure and safe world.

The President: I thank His Excellency Ararat Mirzoyan for his statement. The Conference will now hear an address from the Honourable Tim Watts, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, in a pre-recorded video.

Mr. Watts (Australia) (*in a pre-recorded video statement*): President, Secretary-General, Excellencies, distinguished representatives, it is an honour to address the Conference on Disarmament. I extend my thanks to the Indonesian presidency for its leadership, as well as to the delegation of India for its contribution earlier this year. As we can only solve our biggest problems together, we share a responsibility to engage constructively in the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President, we know that collective commitments to maintain and promote peace are falling short of the mark. At a time of heightened geopolitical tension and strategic competition, we face the risk of escalation. We need look no further than Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and its nuclear threats, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's continued unlawful development of its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programmes as evidence of this risk. At the same time, our region is home to unprecedented military build-up, while transparency and strategic reassurance are lacking. We must commit anew to strengthening any preventative mechanisms to reduce the risk of further conflict.

As the body charged with developing the international rules to support these ends, the Conference on Disarmament plays a vital role. Australia has renewed its enduring commitment to a world without nuclear weapons. Transparency and accountability are at the centre of our approach, as is ensuring that our multilateral security fora remain diverse and inclusive.

We need a fissile material cut-off treaty. This would address a critical gap in our non-proliferation and disarmament architecture by stopping the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. Last year, Australia's Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, joined Japan and the Philippines at the United Nations General Assembly to urge progress on such a treaty. We urge all Conference on Disarmament members to agree to commence negotiations on the treaty – there is no reason to delay.

To build confidence now, we also call on all States with nuclear weapons that have yet to declare and uphold a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons to do so.

Australia supports the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization and its valuable work and welcomes the address made by its Executive Secretary to the Conference on Disarmament this week. We call on all annex 2 States that have yet to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty to do so without delay. Australia will continue to promote nuclear risk reduction and enhanced transparency because we recognize that as a genuine contribution to security and towards disarmament.

We look to the nuclear-weapon States to lead on developing and implementing concrete practical risk reduction measures. Australia will work closely with you, Mr. President, and all Conference on Disarmament members to support this important work.

The President: I thank the Honourable Tim Watts for his statement. I now extend a warm welcome to Her Excellency Yevheniia Filipenko, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva. You have the floor, Excellency.

Ms. Filipenko (Ukraine): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, two years have passed since Russia brazenly launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, plunging Europe into the bloodiest war it had witnessed in eight decades. Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine continues to pose a major threat to international peace and security and to the international order rooted in the Charter of the United Nations. By launching its war of aggression, Russia has shattered the core principles on which global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture has been built: respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and the prohibition of the use of force. Russia's relentless missiles attacks on Ukrainian cities and towns, bringing immense suffering and destruction, will not break the will of the Ukrainian people, who will fight for their right to self-defence under the Charter of the United Nations until the aggressor withdraws all its forces from the entire territory of Ukraine within the internationally recognized borders.

We are deeply grateful to all those countries who are providing us with much-needed and effective tools to exercise this right and to save human lives, protect our land and restore international law and justice.

President Zelensky's peace formula offers the world a road map to a just and lasting peace in Ukraine and stands as a testament to our commitment to peace, diplomacy and dialogue. We call upon all peace-loving nations to join us in this important endeavour as we chart a course to the Global Peace Summit.

Distinguished delegates, Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine has had grave and long-term implications for efforts related to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. The aggressor State has provoked a dangerous imbalance in the global architecture of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation with its decision to suspend participation in the New START and to withdraw its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Russia's violation of 1994 Budapest Memorandum, its militarization of Crimea and other territories of Ukraine and its reckless acts against nuclear safety in Ukraine, alongside its dangerous nuclear rhetoric, underscore the urgency of addressing that country's threat to our common security. The Russian military attacks on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, its seizure and ongoing occupation pose a serious danger of a radioactive disaster at a scale far beyond that of Chernobyl or Fukushima. Russia must cease all military operations and return full control of the Zaporizhzhia power plant to Ukraine, as urged in the relevant resolutions adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors and General Conference.

We strongly condemn Iran and North Korea for their military support to Russia, which enables the aggressor State to pursue its war against Ukraine, killing innocent civilians and destroying the country. Their supply of armed unmanned aerial vehicles and ballistic missiles to Russia constitutes a clear breach of United Nations arms embargoes established pursuant to the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, our concern extends to the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. That country's complicity in the Russian aggression against Ukraine, combined with the adoption of a new military doctrine that contemplates the use of nuclear weapons, poses a significant threat to

the international non-proliferation regime and undermines our multilateral disarmament efforts.

While underlining the enduring value of the Conference of Disarmament, we regret that the work of this important multilateral negotiating body, as well as that of other disarmament and non-proliferation fora, has been undermined by Russia's destructive behaviour, testifying to that country's contempt for disarmament and multilateralism.

In the current challenging global security environment, we should redouble our efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, including through preserving the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime and through the universalization and entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We should also pave the way for concrete negotiations on international instruments, including on security assurances, the non-use and non-threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon States and on the fissile material cut-off treaty.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, the world cannot afford complacency in the wake of Russia's belligerence. We must not allow it to abuse and manipulate multilateral fora to promote lies and disinformation in order to justify what can never be justified. The international community must take resolute steps to deter Russia's attempt to destroy the foundations of international security and stability. Ukraine pledges to be at the forefront of these efforts, actively contributing to the collective endeavour to stop aggression and build a world where the security of all nations, big and small, is protected by the rule of law.

The President: I thank her Excellency Yevheniia Filipenko for her statement. I now extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, Mr. Jakub Wiśniewski, Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland. You have the floor, Excellency.

Mr. Wiśniewski (Poland): Mr. President, distinguished delegates, last Saturday, 24 February, marked exactly two years since the beginning of a totally unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine carried out by Russia, a permanent member of a United Nations Security Council, a nuclear-weapon-possessor State and a member of the Conference on Disarmament.

Every day, we are witnessing the destruction of residential buildings, critical infrastructure, schools and hospitals across the whole of Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainian civilians and soldiers have lost their lives defending their homeland or simply as casualties of a brutal war. Moreover, Moscow's regime does not hesitate to physically eliminate its political opponents, Russian citizens.

In this context, the message from this Conference should be absolutely clear. Russia remains the biggest and most direct threat to global peace and security. Russia is destroying the rules-based international order, with multilateralism at its core.

On the other hand, it is the Ukrainians whose heroism and commitment stand for the principles we are deeply attached to – freedom, the international order and universal values. Ukraine has an absolute right to defend itself, and we have to do our utmost to support Ukrainians in this fight.

We condemn Russia's aggression in the strongest possible terms. We reaffirm our full support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. It is absolutely clear that international relations must not be based on the use of force. Russia's attack on Ukraine, its ongoing campaign of persistent missile, drone, rocket and artillery attacks, the mobilization of Russian armed forces and its aggressive rhetoric on nuclear weapons have brought long-lasting implications for efforts related to arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. This topic has determined discussions in all international fora over the last months and also quite recently during the annual Munich Security Conference.

Unfortunately, Russia also benefits from the support of other members of a Conference of Disarmament. The reported deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus is clear evidence of this specific alliance. For this purpose, Belarus changed not only its military doctrine but also its Constitution. We are witnessing the export

to Russia of kamikaze drones produced by Iran, and ballistic missiles are shipped to Russia from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to attack not only Ukrainian military forces but, first and foremost, to terrorize cities and civilians.

There is no doubt that Russia is aware of the wave of justified criticism expressed by the international community. That is why Russian diplomats recently deliberately blocked, on such a scale, the requests for observer status in the Conference from member States of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Public words of truth regarding its hostile and war-oriented policy is indeed something that Russia must be fearful of. Russia's obstruction-oriented approach is also visible in the other fora related to global and regional security. The last piece of evidence is its de-ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, one of the most important pillars of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

This year, the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the eleventh Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will take place here in Geneva, the birthplace of multilateral diplomacy. We do realize, from our own experience in 2018, how delicate a matter is currently in the hands of the Kazakh Chair. Our expectations are realistic. We would welcome substantial discussion which would pave the way for the final session of the Preparatory Committee in 2025 to set the necessary ground for the 2026 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. At this stage, it is premature to envisage the results of the Review Conference. However, we do believe that a third consecutive failure is not an option for the Treaty itself, which remains one of the last anchors of the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. At the same time, many pressing challenges related to weapons of mass destruction disarmament needed to be addressed accordingly. The fate of the last existing arms control instrument, the New START, is uncertain, and prospects for strategic stability dialogue are dim, especially after Russia's blunt response to the United States proposal in this regard last December.

The chances of relaunching the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or coming to a possible new agreement reflecting the new realities are not very high either. We are especially concerned that the International Atomic Energy Agency cannot comprehensively verify the Iranian nuclear programme. On the other hand, we praise the Agency and its Director General for the role they play in verifying the situation around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant under Russian occupation.

Poland actively supports the Agency, both politically and logistically, in fulfilling its mandate under these extremely difficult circumstances. Meanwhile, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is continuing its missile and nuclear programmes in blatant violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. Beyond any doubt, its intention to further develop the means to deliver nuclear weapons and to develop nuclear weapon capabilities is a threat, not only to the region, but also to all countries that subscribe to the principles of non-proliferation. We should therefore continue our efforts towards the complete and verifiable denuclearization.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, while, understandably, of the utmost importance to Poland, is obviously not the only matter of concern for us with regard to the security dimension on the globe. The situation in the Gaza Strip remains extremely alarming, and Poland, like many other countries, is of the view that a break in hostilities is necessary to improve the dramatic humanitarian conditions in Gaza and to improve the prospects for the release of hostages. We are hopeful that a diplomatic solution will finally prevail.

To conclude, Poland's record in non-proliferation and disarmament is strong and, even in the most difficult times, we will continue to be equal to the task of doing our utmost to respond to today's challenges, being realistic and aware of limitations at the same time. Let me assure you that Poland will continue to take on its share, actively contributing to efforts in this regard, including in the noble forum of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President: I thank His Excellency, Mr. Jakub Wiśniewski, for his statement. The Conference will now hear an address from Mr. Joel Antonio Hernández García, Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights of Mexico, in a pre-recorded video.

Mr. Hernández García (Mexico) (*in a pre-recorded video statement, spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, we thank Indonesia for convening this high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. The Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1978 proclaimed without a vote several of the philosophical principles that still underpin the disarmament work of the United Nations, including, I quote, that “all the peoples of the world have a vital interest in the success of disarmament negotiations”, and established the Conference on Disarmament as the forum for such negotiations.

Unfortunately, the Conference on Disarmament has not agreed, approved or implemented its programme of work in over 27 years. Nor has it considered requests to expand its membership or for civil society observers to participate, or agreed to technical and linguistic adjustments to its regulations, for example, to make them gender-neutral, to mention just some of the recent initiatives that have not come to fruition. Therefore, it has not fulfilled the mandate given to it by the General Assembly in 1978. Meanwhile, there are still more than 12,000 nuclear weapons in the world and their existence continues to threaten humanity. Nuclear-armed States continue to modernize their arsenals and spend on their maintenance, in contrast to the resources earmarked for development aid.

However, outside the Conference on Disarmament, not all has been gloomy. In the last 10 years, the so-called Humanitarian Initiative on the Impact of Nuclear Weapons led to the negotiations of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force in 2021 and in respect of which, under my country’s presidency, the second Conference of the Parties was held last November. In addition to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, three other arms treaties have been negotiated outside the Conference on Disarmament in the years that the impasse in this Conference has lasted.

Some argue that the roots of this paralysis lie in the complex international security situation and the absence of political will. We are definitely in a very turbulent world, with new forms of confrontation and competition among the nuclear-weapon States. However, it is worth questioning whether this situation was the same in each of the 28 years of impasse; or how it is, in other areas of activities of the United Nations, where, paradoxically, the same Governments represented in the Conference on Disarmament participate on the same international stage, that mandates are fulfilled.

For Mexico, the roots of the impasse also lie in the working methods of the Conference on Disarmament, which inhibit decision-making. These include the monthly rotation of the presidency, the practice of negotiating *ad nauseam* the programme of work, which should be a procedural matter, and the fact that all decisions, both substantive and procedural, are adopted according to the rule of consensus, applied as a rule of unanimity or veto. Consensus is and must be an aspiration and should be the ultimate goal of effective multilateralism. It cannot be interpreted as the power of one delegation to impede the work of a forum or to prevent an agreement from being reached.

We are also concerned that the Conference on Disarmament remains busy with so-called informal deliberations in *ad hoc* subsidiary bodies, usurping the functions of the Disarmament Commission in New York and perhaps also of the General Assembly itself. The working methods of the Conference of Disarmament favour the status quo and the interests of a few nuclear-weapon States, to the detriment of the majority. Non-nuclear-weapon States, such as Mexico, also have high national security interests, one of which is that multilateral forums should be effective and responsive to the needs, opinions and interests of our societies.

In the case of the Conference on Disarmament, what we want to see is the negotiation and finalization of the treaties that have been pending since the 1990s and which are a strategic priority for international security, including a fissile material cut-off treaty to serve disarmament and non-proliferation purposes, new rules for nuclear disarmament on negative security assurances and new rules on the prevention of an arms race in outer space and on other weapons of mass destruction such as radiological weapons. Mexico will continue to be flexible in considerations of the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament because we are interested in the advancement of disarmament law and the creation of high international standards for State behaviour, which are crucial for the reduction of tension and risks.

We therefore invite this Conference to reflect seriously on these issues, particularly in light of current discussions to rebuild the United Nations, on the impact of the future and on the new agenda for peace, so that the Conference may once again enjoy the relevance it did at the time of its creation in 1978.

The President: I thank Mr. Joel Antonio Hernández García for his statement. Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, thank you for your active participation in the meeting. This concludes our business for this morning. This afternoon, we will have an informal meeting dedicated to two informal thematic discussions. The topic of the first informal thematic discussion will be overcoming stagnation and ensuring the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament; the topic of the second informal thematic discussion will be addressing contemporary challenges and the promotion of measures to reduce distrust and build confidence. We will resume the list of speakers under the 2024 high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament on Wednesday 28 February. This meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12:40 p.m.