

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 13 June 2002, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Hubert de La Fortelle (France)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I call to order the 905th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. At the outset, on behalf of the Conference, I would like warmly to welcome the new representative of Austria to our midst, Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, and to assure him of our cooperation and our support in the exercise of his duties. If he wishes to take the floor I am happy to call on him.

Mr. PETRITSCH (Austria): Thank you for your kind words of welcome. As I am taking the floor for the first time, I would just like to assure you of my full support and the full support of my delegation. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze on his assumption of the position of Secretary-General of this Conference.

As I have already indicated, I am not making any comments today except to stress Austria's great concern about the continuing stalemate. Let me just say in closing that I look forward to working with you and your colleagues in endeavouring to overcome this sorry state of affairs and to get back to substantive work.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): Next on my list of speakers for today I have the representatives of Kazakhstan, Morocco and the Netherlands. I now call on the representative of Kazakhstan, Ambassador Nurlan Danenov.

Mr. DANENOV (Kazakhstan) (translated from French): Mr. President, as this is my first statement at the Conference on Disarmament under your presidency I would like, first of all, on behalf of the delegation of Kazakhstan, to congratulate you on your accession to this important post. Our delegation believes that under your wise guidance the Conference will be able to catch its breath again, so to speak, to overcome all difficulties, and to make effective progress. I can assure you of our support for all your efforts.

(continued in Russian)

Mr. President, dear colleagues, my statement today has just one goal: briefly to inform you of the holding on 4 June 2002, in Almaty, of the first summit of States parties of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a major event not only in the history of Kazakhstan but in the entire region as a whole, and of the documents adopted at the summit by such countries as Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Turkey and others.

The idea of CICA was first put forward by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, at the forty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 1992. The gist of the Kazakhstan initiative is the creation of an effective mechanism for preventive diplomacy in Asia and the development of a new system of relations of States in this vast region designed to ensure security and stability on the Asian continent.

(Mr. Danenov, Kazakhstan)

This summit showed that a new political process is emerging in the life of the vast Asian continent, in the form of the CICA forum, whose vocation it is to expand the potential for multilateral dialogue among Asian countries and for their interaction as equals, with a view to strengthening security and stability and developing a climate of trust and cooperation.

Any regional security system based on the principles of guaranteed territorial integrity, respect for the sovereignty of States members of the process and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as on the understanding that the negotiating process is the sole basis for settling conflicts and crises, is in keeping with the fundamental principles of global security. It is precisely these principles that are reflected in the adoption of the Almaty Act and the summit's declaration on the eradication of terrorism and the promotion of dialogue among civilizations, which we intend to circulate as official documents of the Conference on Disarmament.

The Almaty Act calls for a number of undertakings to be carried out in parallel. These include the implementation of confidence-building measures and the settlement of disputes, the development of an inventory of confidence-building measures, giving priority attention to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, the creation in Asia of nuclear-free zones and the adoption of obligations relating to the combating of terrorism and separatism. In the summit's declaration, which stands as the reaction of our countries to the challenges of terrorism and extremism, we have developed a common position against that evil. The leaders of the States participating in the summit stressed the need to support and develop dialogue among civilizations as one of the crucial means of eradicating terrorism and preventing conflicts between various peoples and countries.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Kazakhstan for his statement and I now call on the distinguished representative of Morocco, Ambassador Omar Hilale.

Mr. HILALE (Morocco) (translated from French): Mr. President, I am pleased to be able to present to you my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of this important negotiating body, the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation congratulates you on two counts. First, you represent France, a friendly country with which my country maintains historic, close and very special ties at all levels and, second, your qualities as a seasoned ambassador, your diplomatic acumen and your fine judgement, coupled with your great experience, are all portends of a successful presidency.

May I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Markku Reimaa of Finland, for the imagination and untiring energy which he brought to bear on the task of forging consensus on a programme of work for our Conference. Similarly I would like to extend my congratulations to Mr. Mohammed Tawfik of Egypt and to Ambassador Fisseha Yimer of Ethiopia.

(Mr. Hilale, Morocco)

I must also congratulate Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze on his appointment as Secretary-General of our Conference, Mr. Román-Morey, the Deputy Secretary-General, and the Conference secretariat and convey my admiration and respect for their dedication.

Finally I would like to say how honoured and happy I am to be back with the Conference on Disarmament after having had the privilege of participating in its work 10 years ago. I also take this opportunity to thank my colleagues for their kind words of welcome and to tell them how much I look forward to working with them in our joint endeavour to achieve the objectives of our Conference.

In my turn, I also share the pleasant duty of extending a warm welcome to our new colleagues, my friend Michael Smith of Australia, Ambassador Kuniko Inoguchi of Japan and Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch of Austria, and to say how much their contribution will be valued in our Conference.

The tragic and abominable events of 11 September made clear how international security and the security of our countries are so very fragile. They also underscored the urgent need to strengthen the international non-proliferation regime, as well as the multilateral approach advocated up to now in considering issues related to international security and disarmament.

The responsibility that we have today is to find the right answers to these new challenges, to the fears and concerns of the international community. Effective implementation of the provisions of international treaties, international cooperation and strengthened multilateralism are essential elements in the building of a better world, a world of peace and security for all. To this end, the international community is called on to display political determination, solidarity and collective commitment.

The Conference on Disarmament has a paramount role to play in meeting the challenges of the third millennium. Its mission as the sole United Nations multilateral negotiating body on disarmament remains as valid and vital as ever. While we should not underestimate its current stalemate, there can be no long-term vision without an equal admixture of dreams and realism. These are not just pious sentiments: the Conference on Disarmament must fulfil its mandate as a negotiating forum, characterized by constructive and substantial dialogue.

A new page was written in the history of disarmament in Moscow on 14 May, with the signature by President Bush and President Putin of a disarmament treaty replacing the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and committing Russia and the United States of America to reducing their nuclear warheads from 6,000 to a range of 1,700-2,000. This treaty marks a clear break from the traditional approach to arms control, in that it concedes to both parties the right to make reductions at their own speed, to suspend them or even to resume and strengthen them, to withdraw from the treaty or to rejoin it as they see fit.

(Mr. Hilale, Morocco)

Despite its imperfections, the Treaty nevertheless represents an important and promising step forward on the path which is so dear to us, namely, towards the goal of eliminating all nuclear weapons from our planet. It has the additional merit of giving fresh impetus to the disarmament process after so many years of stagnation. The alternative would be to maintain the current status quo, with the risks inherent in the retention of so many nuclear warheads. It is for that reason that Morocco welcomes this agreement, while hoping that the symmetry thus created, as well as the new partnership between Russia and NATO, will strengthen mutual trust and usher in new stages in this steady progression towards arms control. As our ultimate goal is to prevent nuclear proliferation and to arrive at the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, any agreement, however modest, is an important milestone in the building of a world free from nuclear menace.

In its capacity as a State party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Kingdom of Morocco subscribes fully to the principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament agreed to at the NPT Review and Extension Conference in 1995, which established the responsibility of nuclear Powers to report on their efforts to ensure the gradual elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The sixth Review Conference of NPT, held in May 2000, made considerable progress in the area of nuclear disarmament, with the adoption by consensus of the unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals and to conduct a series of practical measures for the full implementation of the Treaty and of the 1995 principles and objectives.

In this context the Kingdom of Morocco keenly favours the establishment, within the framework of the Conference on Disarmament, of a committee on nuclear disarmament with a negotiating mandate for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. In the absence of such negotiating mandate, however, Morocco is prepared to support any formula propitious to the substantial consideration of specific nuclear disarmament measures, in accordance with the objectives set out by the sixth Review Conference of NPT.

Similarly, Morocco considers that the establishment of a committee to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty is more necessary than ever, particularly in the aftermath of 11 September. It is clear that such a treaty would be an essential contribution both to international security and to disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, provided that it was not discriminatory in nature and preserved the right of all countries to have access to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

True to its commitment to the cause of general and complete disarmament, Morocco has just enacted a series of measures in implementation of its strategic decision to work towards the prohibition of all categories of weapons of mass destruction and the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime. In this context, I am pleased to be able to announce my country's ratification on 1 March 2002 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Similarly, the Kingdom of Morocco, which unreservedly adheres to the principle of the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and in particular nuclear weapons, has ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty and is committed to implementation of the international monitoring system under the Treaty. It is in that spirit that we reiterate our appeal to all States which have not yet done so to accede to the Treaty.

(Mr. Hilale, Morocco)

Furthermore, on 19 March 2002 the Moroccan Government subscribed to the provisions of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and to three of its protocols, including the amended Protocol on prohibitions or restrictions on the use of mines, booby traps and other devices. Through this ratification Morocco aimed to express its determination to contribute to the effort by the international community to eradicate the scourge of these inhumane weapons.

At a time when new challenges loom over our world, the response by the international community should include efforts to strengthen and enhance the international non-proliferation regime through the strict and non-selective implementation of all the provisions to be found in the various treaties aimed at disarmament and arms control. More than ever our Conference needs less Platonic discourse and more political flexibility, wisdom and determination so that it does not turn into a mere talking shop. This objective can only be attained through the strengthening of multilateralism, which, in its dimension of disarmament and the strengthening of international peace and security, finds its very embodiment in our Conference. It is our hope that all the members of the Conference might share this vision, so that this forum can fulfil the mandate entrusted to it by the international community, a mandate reaffirmed emphatically by a unanimous United Nations General Assembly in the aftermath of the outrages of 11 September.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of Morocco for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now call on the representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Chris Sanders.

Mr. SANDERS (Netherlands): As this is the first time that I take the floor during your presidency, Mr. President, let me congratulate you and let me assure you that we have the fullest confidence in the French leadership to bring this Conference to fruition.

Last Friday, 7 June 2002, the Netherlands organized an open-ended informal meeting on the issue of banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

The total number of participants at this meeting was well over 100. Over 40 countries attended this meeting as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations, some international organizations, and IAEA in Vienna.

In his presentation, Dr. Barnaby, a well-known nuclear physicist and former Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), outlined the need for such a treaty. The CTBT - apart from being an efficient non-proliferation instrument - sets a qualitative limit on the development of nuclear weapons. The treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices will set a quantitative limit on the production of fissile material. It therefore will be an important contribution towards non-proliferation and an essential next step towards nuclear disarmament. It will also contribute to reducing the risks of nuclear terrorism.

(Mr. Sanders, Netherlands)

The discussion after Dr. Barnaby's presentation highlighted the need for a better understanding of the subject. Issues raised in the discussion included the risks of proliferation of plutonium and highly enriched uranium, the physical protection of fissile material stocks, reprocessing, MOXing, semi-military uses like naval propulsion, nuclear terrorism and the feasibility of producing so-called "dirty bombs" from highly enriched uranium.

Participants encouraged my delegation to continue this exercise. My delegation intends to organize the next substantial meeting in this exercise at the same time in mid-September. We will keep you informed.

For the information of all delegations, I would like to ask the secretariat of the Conference to circulate a letter to which the statement of Dr. Barnaby, as well as my non-paper on the exercise, are attached.

We will keep the Conference informed about the further development of this exercise, which received widespread support and is considered to be a most useful activity in promoting the cause of such a treaty.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank Ambassador Chris Sanders, the representative of the Netherlands, for his statement. With that statement, we have come to the end of the list of speakers. If there are no other delegations wishing to take the floor, I shall now conclude with a few words on the progress in my consultations since last Thursday.

With only one week left before the end of the French presidency, time is running out and the term of office is too short. True to the initial commitment which I gave at the outset of this presidency, I would now like to share with you a few ideas which have been inspired in me today by my bilateral consultations with more than 40 - even as many as 50 - delegations and by my meetings with groups or with their coordinators.

I should warn you that these ideas are not entirely optimistic. To be brief, as General de Gaulle's foreign minister, Mr. Couve de Murville, a man whom I knew briefly at the outset of my career, always instructed his staff, my feelings could be summed up in two words: frustration and perseverance.

First, frustration: I refer not so much to my own frustration as to that of all the colleagues to whom I have spoken. Most of these colleagues are surprised at the lack of action and the paralysis afflicting our Conference. While fully appreciating the impact which the international strategic context has on its ability to function, as recalled by some speakers this morning, colleagues are both incredulous and even exasperated at what, in another context, Milton Friedman calls the tyranny of the status quo, at its inability to move. Why should it be impossible to engage in dialogue, including to agree to disagree, as I recall used to be the case in our forum during the cold war? At that time we did at least have dialogue.

(The President)

After frustration - perseverance: a more agreeable and more positive term. To date, I have gleaned a number of suggestions, some very modest, others more ambitious, but still fairly modest, which I am continuing to sound out with all delegations, including those playing a key role and with whom I am constantly in touch. Even if the resources of imagination and creativity in the area of arms control and disarmament are not unlimited, as they could be in the area of art, I have left no path unexplored. You know the saying: "Impossible n'est pas français". This is why my staff and I have decided to continue our consultations until the very end of the French presidency, lest we miss even the slightest chance, as tiny as it might be, to agree on a minimum threshold which would lead to a new start, a turnaround, brought to us from elsewhere. For this is something we wish for with all our hearts and that will enable us to agree on a programme of work.

In this context I take note with interest of the new Chinese proposal on space which was conveyed to us yesterday at the presidential consultations.

At this point, may I add that it is a good idea for new or improved proposals to be submitted to the Conference by those who are in a position to do so and that member States should respond to those proposals.

In conclusion I call upon you all in these difficult times - both for delegations and, above all, for our Conference, to whose continued well-being we are all so committed, to follow the advice so succinctly offered in the seventeenth century by the French mathematician, physicist and - in particular - philosopher, Blaise Pascal, in his aphorism: "Let us avoid two excesses, to exclude reason and to admit only reason."

Even though there may be no comments from the floor, I still put the question to you. That concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held next Thursday, 20 June 2002, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.