

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 8 August 2002, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Volker Heinsberg (Germany)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 909th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Italy and of Brazil. I now give the floor to the representative of Italy, Ambassador Mario Maiolini.

Mr. MAIOLINI (Italy): At the outset I would like to express my delight in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament at this delicate moment. We feel assured that, with your wisdom and the full dedication of your country to progress in the field of disarmament, you will lead us on the best course to enable the Conference to commence its substantive work as soon as possible. In your endeavours you can count on the full support of the Italian delegation.

In this spirit, Mr. President, we praise the new vigour with which you are prompting us to make new efforts, to propose new ideas and to engage in an intensified dialogue in order finally to agree on our programme of work. It is in this same spirit that we have taken good note of the German initiative to give a new look at the question of radiological weapons in order to favour renewed attention to dangerous developments in the field outside this room. In the light of recent reports on terrorist efforts, this is surely not a dormant issue. The efforts of the Conference on Disarmament to adopt a convention were not successful 10 years ago; but this clearly did not settle the question. "Everything moves", as Heraclitus and Lao Tzu stressed; so we cannot remain at a standstill. Otherwise things will get worse. The security environment is changing, threat perceptions are changing, and technology seems to be changing at a pace speedier than ever, as Robert Reich said in his The Unhappiness of Success. We are bound to adjust ourselves and our agenda. Disarmament cannot stop its progress, otherwise the international situation will get more dangerous.

With this in mind, the Italian delegation also welcomes the recent initiative of the five ambassadors. We can say it is almost a club. First, we need new initiatives in order to seek, with unrelenting perseverance, consensual agreement on our programme of work, which is desired by all delegations and yet still eludes us.

The five ambassadors' initiative is appreciated as well because it comes from a group of highly respected colleagues, representing countries deeply engaged in disarmament, who can - mostly and largely - profit from the experience of recent presidencies of the Conference on Disarmament.

Moreover, we commend the fact that we are dealing with a cross-regional group initiative, which might help us to look at problems and their interconnections from a different perspective, and beyond overly artificial dividing lines.

Finally, we are satisfied with the open-ended and informal approach which has guided the five ambassadors. Their draft is open to suggestions and integrations. Enough time is available to provide contributions to the final text, which we hope to see formalized by the end of this month. The whole process is a common effort undertaken to reach common success for all countries here represented.

(Mr. Maiolini, Italy)

With regard to the merits of the proposal, the long list of all the possible decisions to be taken - four ad hoc committees and three special coordinators - confirms us in the conviction that the amount of work waiting to be tackled by the Conference on Disarmament is enormous, highly important and really urgent. So, no excuse for inactivity in the Conference can be drawn from the scope of the disarmament agenda nor from the pressing needs posed by the global security situation.

We share the belief that the items put forward by the five ambassadors in their suggested programme of work deserve our attention as a matter of priority. The programme may seem too ambitious, but surely it is a complete recollection of all the issues which have confronted and eluded us all these long months.

Indeed, in addition to the seven suggested subsidiary bodies, it is also important that we do not forget the valuable ongoing activities of the three special coordinators on the agenda, membership and better functioning of the Conference on Disarmament. We await the results of their consultations and will read their reports with attention.

It is no secret that Italy regards as its priority the immediate start of negotiations on an FMCT. But, on this occasion, let me also repeat, once again, that Italy does not place any linkage between the different issues on our agenda and is ready to work and possibly to negotiate on any issue on its own merit. We expect other delegations to do the same. History has by now taught us that the easiest way not to have negotiations is to put preconditions on them. That is the easiest way to create a deadlock and that is exactly what we need to avoid. Indeed, an open-minded approach and a positive political will by all capitals would ensure the success of the Conference on Disarmament, respecting its primary role as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The stalemate means that contending delegations prefer a deadlock to any change in their positions. Every delegation with opposing negotiating positions evidently thinks that losing time serves its own national interests. But, clearly, the loss of time cannot be an equal advantage to all contending partners: someone must be mistaken in its own assessment.

Indeed, each day in which we do not start our substantive work is also a day in which we deprive ourselves of the results of negotiations, deliberations or preparatory discussions on questions of such a great momentum as a cut-off treaty, nuclear disarmament, PAROS or negative security assurances. Any day of inactivity in dealing with those issues - each one taken on its own merit - does not come to us free of charge.

Accordingly, a new reassessment of the situation is needed now more than ever. Otherwise, we will not avoid the only certain conclusion: deadlock would be a dramatic defeat for all of us as a group and a fundamental detriment to the international community as a whole. I believe that no delegation here will bear such a grave responsibility lightly in the face of history.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Italy for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Brazil, Ambassador Assumpção do Valle Pereira.

Ms. ASSUMPCÃO DO VALLE PEREIRA (Brazil): Mr. President, let me begin by expressing the Brazilian delegation's satisfaction at seeing you presiding over our work and by sincerely congratulating you on the way you have conducted your presidency. Please be assured - you and your delegation - of the full support and cooperation of the Brazilian delegation in the exercise of your important responsibilities.

I have asked for the floor to support the joint initiative by the delegations of China and of the Russian Federation on possible elements for a future international legal agreement on the prevention of the deployment of weapons in outer space.

The Brazilian Government supports the commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The initiative by the Chinese and Russian delegations is in conformity with the Brazilian position on the exclusively peaceful uses of outer space and is in line with the commitments assumed by Brazil under multilateral treaties and bilateral agreements on the peaceful use of outer space, to which we are a party.

Moreover, it is a unique initiative, which complements the efforts aimed at strengthening the multilateral approach in international negotiations on security, disarmament and non-proliferation.

Once a decision is taken to establish an ad hoc committee on PAROS, my delegation will certainly have more specific comments to make.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Brazil for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. As I see no other speakers wishing to take the floor, this concludes our list of speakers for today.

Before we adjourn this meeting I would like to make the following remarks on behalf of the presidency. I am continuing presidential consultations with a view to finding common ground for a work programme on the so-called "four issues". I am also keeping in contact with our distinguished colleagues who have forwarded the initiative of the five former presidents. I remain in close contact as well with our special coordinators, Ambassador Chung, Ambassador Kariyawasam and Ambassador Tzantchev, who have indicated to me that at this stage they intend to finalize their respective reports by the end of August.

(The President)

This concludes our business for today. In accordance with my announcement at the plenary meeting last Wednesday, however, I will convene - in three minutes' time - informal open-ended consultations on the issue of radiological weapons.

I thank the secretariat for having distributed on 2 August my discussion paper on that issue, and I would like to underline that these consultations are open to members and observer States of the Conference only.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 15 August 2002, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.