

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 22 February 2005, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Tim CAUGHLEY (New Zealand)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 975th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I should like to make some opening remarks as New Zealand assumes the presidency of this Conference. I shall make a number of fairly clear points about the state of the Conference viewed from the perspective of this rostrum.

First, I congratulate wholeheartedly Ambassador Chris Sanders of the Netherlands for the committed, energetic and transparent way with which he discharged his presidential responsibilities. As colleagues know, my predecessor was very quick out of the starting blocks and made every post a winning post. He rightly sought to maximize the options open to the first President of the year. Chris Sanders has now passed the baton to me, and I could not have asked for a smoother changeover.

Second, let me expand on the significance of the smooth handover. To help overcome the limitations of rapidly rotating presidencies (an issue to which the distinguished Ambassador of Japan has drawn our attention), New Zealand offered the Netherlands presidency its willingness to provide the maximum degree of continuity. What Ambassador Sanders has begun I intend to continue. The CD is meeting on this Tuesday - today - instead of Thursday in an effort to sustain the momentum, and I will be keeping my successor, the distinguished Ambassador of Nigeria, very closely informed along the way.

Third, I hope that all colleagues will agree that through his determined efforts the previous President has tapped into a reservoir that lies very close to the surface of this Conference, a reservoir palpably brimming with desire to get down to the real work in the priority areas foreshadowed in successive draft work programmes. This level of concern seems to me to be based not only on the intrinsic importance of those issues in the current international security environment but also on the need to shore up what my distinguished counterpart from South Africa has described as the "credibility" of the Conference.

Fourth, the matters to which I have just referred must be assumed to be of concern to the political leaders of all the members of the Conference on Disarmament. If so, we need to ask ourselves whether, month in, month out, we can reasonably expect the person sitting in this chair to rescue the CD. That surely is a joint responsibility. I will come back shortly to how I see my role in coordinating the discharge of that collective responsibility over the next four weeks.

Fifth, Ambassador Chris Sanders has wisely counselled this body as follows (and I quote from his concluding statement of 17 February): "*Effective multilateralism presupposes a genuine attitude to take each other's proposals seriously. It also means that if you cannot accept a certain proposal, you explain the reasoning behind it, and subsequently you put forward a credible counterproposal. You cannot simply continue saying no, or making proposals which you know will stand no chance of getting any support.*" Chris Sanders knows that I strongly subscribe to that sentiment.

(The President)

Sixth, as everyone is aware, the current review cycle of the Non-Proliferation Treaty is about to reach its culmination. Members who have addressed the CD this year, including the distinguished Ambassadors of Algeria and Norway, have also drawn our attention to the broader expectations of this Conference held by the United Nations as a whole.

These various expectations relate to concrete activities and outcomes of this very Conference. The New Zealand presidency is the last *full* presidency before the NPT Review Conference. My concluding statement a month hence will offer a timely opportunity for the President to assess the extent to which the CD has lived up to the expectations placed on it by the previous NPT Review Conference in the year 2000. I intend to make such an assessment, reflecting not only such progress as is made in this chamber and its corridors these next four weeks, but also drawing attention to the specific obstacles that stand in the way. Significantly, the last week of the New Zealand presidency will see a number of Ministers address this body. This will afford an opportunity to sensitize them and perhaps their counterparts more universally on the prospects for, indeed the very health of, the Conference on Disarmament.

My seventh and final point is about getting down to business to settle our programme of work. I would appreciate it if the regional coordinators would convene their groups and concentrate during the next two weeks on gauging the acceptability of the approach that is taken in Ambassador Sanders' "food for thought" paper. As Chris Sanders has said, his idea is not intended as an alternative to any existing proposal, but as a focus for our collective thoughts as we confront what seems to me to be a crossroads for this Conference.

For my part I plan to do the following. While I would like to meet with the regional coordinators tomorrow afternoon as usual, I do not intend to solicit preliminary responses from them. Rather, I will wait until Wednesday, 2 March to ask them to let me know the outcome of the group discussions, and on Thursday, 3 March I will report back to the plenary. In the meantime I have initiated a series of bilateral consultations.

It follows from what I said earlier in this opening statement that when the regional coordinators report back on 2 March I will be looking to each of them to answer several questions. If this is food for thought, I am interested not in what you would savour but in what you can swallow. The questions are:

First, are there any members of the group - the regional group, that is - that would be obliged by their capitals to block consensus on the establishment of subsidiary bodies in the manner contemplated in the "non-paper"?

(The President)

Second, if so,

- (a) What is the specific difficulty or difficulties confronting those delegations, and
- (b) What alternative formulation or proposal would overcome such a problem or problems, yet would at the same time stand a real prospect of securing consensus in the CD?

Unless and until these problems are made transparent, the Conference cannot hope to find consensus, and the shadow over its usefulness may darken.

This is a sobering note on which to close, but I do not wish to be seen as pessimistic. On the contrary, the enthusiasm and energy that Chris Sanders has brought to this office is contagious, and I hope that it will infect our work not just through New Zealand's presidency but beyond. As many members have already made clear during these barren eight years, I believe that this troubled world expects it.

I have no speakers on my list for today, but can I invite any delegation that wishes to take the floor to do so now. That does not seem to be the case.

In that case, we have no further business for today. The statement that I have just made will, however, be circulated immediately to all of you, and of course, it will encapsulate the questions that I have just posed for discussion at the regional group level over the next two weeks.

If there is no further request for the floor, this concludes our business for today. The next plenary will be held on Thursday, 3 March 2005, at 10 a.m., and I have several speakers inscribed for that occasion.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.