

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.1011*
9 March 2006

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND ELEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 9 March 2006, at 10.05 a.m.

President: Mr. PARK In-kook (Republic of Korea)

* Reissued for technical reasons.

GE.06-63383 (E) 140806

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1011th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I would like to warmly welcome the women representing the NGO Working Group on Peace of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, who, as in previous years, have attended a seminar to mark International Women's Day. Members of women's non-governmental organizations who participated in this year's seminar on "Uranium - from depleted to fissile materials" are with us today, and in keeping with a long tradition, they have addressed a message to the Conference on Disarmament.

Before reading out the message, however, I will give the floor to Ambassador Gordan Markotić of Croatia, the President of the Mine Ban Convention, who will make a statement on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention.

Mr. MARKOTIĆ (Croatia): At the outset let me express our satisfaction at seeing you, Mr. President, in the Chair, and, at the same time, our sincere conviction that, together with the other five Presidents of this year's session, you will guide this august forum in the resumption of its work and steer it towards regaining its unique position in the world of disarmament and arms control.

On Wednesday last, that is on 1 March, we celebrated the seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Broadly speaking, the Mine Ban Convention is in very good shape. This we owe very much to our capable predecessor in the President's chair - Austria, that is, Ambassador Petritsch and his qualified team, who, without fail, guided our efforts towards a mine-free world last year. During our presidency, we will do our best to continue along the same path towards the achievement of our common goals.

As most of you know, this Convention is a product of the unique partnership between governments and civil society. Having that in mind, we commend primarily the ICBL and the ICRC for their efforts in bringing this Convention to life and, led by this and other similar examples, would also like to support stronger engagement of civil society in the work of this esteemed body. No doubt, the Mine Ban Convention represents a sprinkling of multilateralism in the hard times of its twilight.

Let me now inform you of the latest figures and developments in the life of the Mine Ban Convention. Some three quarters of the world's States are parties to the Convention (149), and there are signs that in the very near future - by the next meeting of the States Parties that will be held this September in Geneva - a few others will join. Although 45 countries have not yet signed the Convention, it is important to stress that the Convention has established a new international norm which is equally observed by the majority of the States that, for a variety of reasons, have not (yet) joined the Convention, but nevertheless see the merit in its application. As the result of these developments, the use of anti-personnel mines has been significantly

(Mr. Markotić, Croatia)

reduced, their production is increasingly slowing down and the trade in this weapon has almost completely ceased. Additionally, the States parties to the Convention have had great success in the destruction of stockpiled mines, strictly respecting in that regard the stockpile destruction deadlines enshrined in the Convention. Furthermore, having in mind the rapidly approaching 2009 mine clearance deadline for the first States that joined the Convention, it is noteworthy that this most important short-term goal of the Convention is moving apace. And finally, and most importantly, the victims of this horrifying weapon are receiving far better care, while the annual number of new victims is considerably lessened compared to only a few years ago.

As most of you know, the sixth Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention was held from 28 November to 2 December 2005, in Zagreb, Croatia. It was the first meeting to be held following the First Review Conference - the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-free World - and, as such, its prime task was to evaluate the implementation of the first year of the Nairobi Action Plan - a forward-looking document adopted in Nairobi, consisting of 70 concrete actions which are to guide the efforts of States parties "towards ending, for all people ... for all time, the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines". At the same time, the task facing the States parties in Zagreb was to set forth priorities and goals for the coming year, as well as to ensure that the necessary momentum to carry States parties up to the second Review Conference in 2009 is maintained. This evaluation of implementation and forward-looking set of priorities were contained in the main outcome of the sixth Meeting of the States Parties, the Zagreb Progress Report.

Since many of you were in Zagreb, I will not enter into a detailed recapitulation of what has been accomplished since the first Review Conference. However, allow me to briefly bring you up to date.

In terms of the universalization of the Convention, since the 2004 Nairobi Summit, five additional States have ratified or acceded to the Convention, bringing to 149 the number of States which have formally joined the Convention - most recently, Ukraine's deposition of its instrument of ratification on 27 December last year and Haiti's on 15 February of this year.

Regarding stockpiles, at the close of the Nairobi Summit, 16 States parties had not yet completed the destruction of stockpiled mines. Most recently, Algeria completed its destruction programme. There are now only 14 States parties which have not yet completed the destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines.

As for demining, since the Nairobi Summit, Suriname has indicated that it has fulfilled its obligations under article 5 of the Convention to clear all the anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control. In addition, at the sixth Meeting of States Parties, Guatemala announced that it too had achieved this milestone, becoming the sixth State party reporting to have done so.

Finally, in terms of victim assistance, many of the 24 States parties that have reported significant numbers of landmine survivors spent much of 2005 developing concrete and time-bound victim assistance objectives to guide their efforts in rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine survivors.

(Mr. Markotić, Croatia)

Meeting security challenges as set forth in the Mine Ban Convention requires all States parties to place at the forefront two main concepts - responsibility and cooperation. These two notions not only form the backbone of this Convention, but should also form the cornerstone of sound international relations, especially in the field of disarmament and arms control. As sovereign States, States parties to the Convention are responsible for what happens within their borders, and that includes, above all, the well-being of all their citizens. In the context of the Mine Ban Treaty, this means that States parties like Croatia, which have reported mined areas and a significant number of mine victims, are ultimately responsible for ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of mine survivors, as well as for clearing all mines under their jurisdiction or control. At the same time, it is not to be forgotten that, according to article 6 of the Convention, those States in a position to do so should provide the necessary assistance to those mine-affected States who need it. The hundreds of millions of dollars that have been generated in recent years for mine action are a testament to the degree to which donor States have lived up to their task. Nevertheless, though substantial, it is obvious that the funds generated up to now have not been sufficient. Mine-affected countries lack the necessary resources for all mine action activities, particularly for mine removal, which is the most important short-term goal of the Convention. It is to meet this most expensive obligation and most pressing problem that all States parties face, as the mine clearance deadline of 1 March 2009 approaches for the first States that joined the Convention, that renewed efforts must be made.

Finally, we believe that all States with security high on their agendas are responsible for working towards the goals set forth in the Convention. We must not forget that it is a joint responsibility of mine-free States and mine-contaminated States alike, as States parties to the Convention, to give as much as possible of their financial, technical and educational resources to rid our world of anti-personnel landmines. Only by accepting joint responsibility and by working in cooperation will we achieve our goal - a more secure world, free of anti-personnel mines.

Let me conclude by stating that we believe that the CD might also benefit from the spirit of responsibility and cooperation present amongst States parties to the Mine Ban Convention and break out of the deadlock in which it has found itself for the past eight years.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Markotić of Croatia for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I shall now read out the message from the participants in the International Women's Day seminar addressed to the Conference on Disarmament.

“Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

“We were hoping to be able to read this statement to you in 2006 for the first time in the more than 20 years we have been presenting one to the CD. However, despite all the support we have heard over the past several weeks, it is apparently not yet possible to have a female civil-society leader address you from the floor in a statement delivered

(The President)

once a year on the occasion of International Women's Day. Although we are disappointed that we are unable to read our own statement, we see this as a testimony to the power of civil society and women's NGOs in particular. We would especially like to thank the ambassadors and representatives who so eloquently spoke on our behalf to request the opportunity to address this forum ourselves.

"International Women's Day began in 1909 and has been directly linked with the engagement of women in political processes. In the CD, only 13 per cent of member State delegations are led by women. This year, civil society around the world is marking International Women's Day through protesting war, campaigning for nuclear disarmament and demanding equal participation at all levels of decision-making. As we have done since 1984, we are bringing the voices of women to the CD.

"NGOs have long been called the conscience of the international community, but we also serve practical functions. Every week, we are in the gallery, listening to the public debates and then sharing them with concerned people around the world. We offer numerous resources to you - we act as a liaison to the public, as a source for technical expertise, as archives and as institutional memory.

"Our utility in these areas is widely recognized and we have formed fruitful collaborative relationships with governments over the years. It is time for you to formally recognize our work and explore best practices developed in other international security forums here in the CD. The CD will benefit from greater transparency and engagement with the outside world. We are happy to work with you to facilitate that.

"Having watched this forum for decades, allow us to share some observations from the gallery. On the programme of work that has eluded you for the past nine years, we not only hear the most governmental support for the 'five Ambassadors' proposal' to establish ad hoc committees on a fissile material treaty, prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS), nuclear disarmament and negative security assurances (NSAs), but also have not yet heard a single plenary statement opposing it. We are told the CD is no closer to consensus, but not told why. The world would like to know who opposes the A5 proposal, and why, and what alternative suggestions will be made to achieve consensus on a programme of work.

"Nor have we heard a single State publicly oppose a fissile material treaty (FMT). If the only impediment to beginning negotiations is the CD's inability to reach consensus on a programme of work, then we expect we will see significant efforts, especially from the major stakeholders, to delve into the issues surrounding an FMT this year. The Presidents of the year have provided you with an excellent opportunity to investigate technical issues and explore convergence in areas of difficulty. Any serious examination will include technical experts from around the world and capitals. We expect to see members of the newly formed fissile materials panel here in May, as well as experts from your capitals. We expect to see in-depth debate on verification and on existing stocks. We expect these discussions to act as pre-negotiations to develop a

(The President)

framework for negotiations. We also expect these discussions to be of enough significance to regenerate confidence in the CD so that negotiations can begin as soon as possible. The seriousness of this exercise will have a significant influence on the outside world's opinion of the CD's ability to work without help from other forums.

“NGOs are ready to support and encourage all pre-negotiations and negotiations of an FMT. Our International Women's Day seminar this year paid attention to an FMT, linking it to making progress on non-proliferation and disarmament. An FMT is verifiable, and verification is absolutely crucial to any effective disarmament and non-proliferation regime. We believe that just as the international community learned how to verify the CTB, which was then negotiated, science will prove the verifiability of an FMT. We want you to begin negotiations as soon as possible, and if they begin before you reach consensus on verification, we are confident these issues can and will be worked out during negotiations.

“We believe nuclear disarmament can and will be achieved. We recognize there are challenges and setbacks in the process of achieving true international peace and security, but our confidence in this body to overcome those obstacles remains strong.”

This message was sent by the NGO Working Group on Peace, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the International Alliance of Women.

On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, I should like to thank the participants in the seminar marking International Women's Day for their message and for their tireless and determined efforts in advocating disarmament, peace and security for all.

Before proceeding to the next stage of our debate, I would like to bid farewell to Ambassador Tim Caughley, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the Conference on Disarmament, who is concluding his assignment today.

Ambassador Caughley joined the Conference on Disarmament in February 2002. His strong commitment to the resolution of the outstanding issues on the Conference's agenda and the commencement of substantive work were particularly evident during his presidency last year. We are also familiar with his remarkable professionalism and passion demonstrated at other disarmament forums, in particular at the 2005 NPT Review Conference and its preparatory subcommittees. We are all waiting to welcome him back soon, when he returns to Geneva to assume new duties as the Director of the Geneva branch of the Department of Disarmament Affairs and as the Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference.

I have the following speakers on my list for today's plenary meeting: Algeria, Australia, Austria, Malaysia, South Africa, Argentina, Canada, Switzerland, Japan, South Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic, Israel, New Zealand and Norway.

I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria, Mr. Hamza Khelif.

Mr. KHELIF (Algeria) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, allow me to refer to a subject which is not on the agenda for this meeting but whose importance is so great that I feel emboldened to raise it and beg the indulgence of the members of the Conference. I should like to thank you, Sir, and through you, the members of the Conference for inviting the distinguished Permanent Representative of Croatia, pursuant to article 34 of the Conference's rules of procedure, to speak before the Conference on the anniversary of the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention.

Before I turn to the Ottawa Convention, I wish to express regret at the fact that the situation at the Conference has prevented non-governmental organizations from delivering even one statement for a year now. This is all the more surprising since it deprives the Conference of the chance to benefit from the experience of NGOs in promoting international peace and security, in contrast with the state of affairs in other forums. The Ottawa Convention, of which we will be speaking, is a live example of how successful such involvement can be.

As you well know, on 1 March we celebrated the seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines, otherwise known as the Ottawa Convention. I have asked for the floor today to speak about the importance of this international instrument, what has been accomplished, and the obstacles to implementation.

Anti-personnel mines are indiscriminate weapons which pose a very great and a lasting threat, especially to civilians. They create permanent disabilities and victims. The end of a conflict does not mean the end of explosions, which claim new victims. The process continues for tens of years so long as the weapons are buried here and there.

The destructive impact of this scourge is very wide and deep. The Secretary-General of the United Nations described it very well in his 1998 report on assistance in mine clearance. Paragraph 160 of the report states that "Landmines are exceptionally pernicious because they have the power to disrupt both long-term sustainable development and short-term delivery of humanitarian assistance. Wherever they are deployed, landmines pose a real and constant risk." As stated in the report by Handicap International entitled "What are mine victims' rights?", these weapons have an impact on the course of life itself, not just the environment. There can be no justification for using such weapons, especially given the enormous damage that they do compared to their very limited strategic and military value.

We still believe that the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention offers a comprehensive and definitive solution to this question. It sets legal standards for the total prohibition and elimination of these weapons. It is also an example of multilateral cooperation, international solidarity and partnership between all the parties in the international community, including Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society. It demonstrates the importance of concerted efforts to stop mines from claiming new victims and to show solidarity with existing victims. It is a humanitarian effort to remove this weapon from the lexicon of mankind and it is a cornerstone of international law, as well as a tool for the complete elimination of these weapons. It also represents an important element in building trust between countries.

(Mr. Khelif, Algeria)

Since Algeria is firmly committed to the promotion of international peace and security, it acceded to the Ottawa Convention and to most international instruments on non-proliferation and disarmament. The issue of anti-personnel mines is very important for our country, since it is bound up with the modern history of the Algerian people. It reminds us of the minefields of Challe and Morice which were laid by colonial forces along our eastern border with Tunisia and our western border with Morocco to prevent the Algerian people from regaining national sovereignty. Every time a mine explodes in these areas, claiming a new victim, we remember the tragic colonial era.

Algeria is determined to contribute to the fight against anti-personnel mines. Since national sovereignty was restored in 1962, Algeria has worked to rid the country of this instrument of death and mutilation. Ever since we ratified the Ottawa Convention in 2001, we have worked to the best of our ability to honour all our commitments. In November 2005, Algeria completed the destruction of its stockpiles of anti-personnel mines in compliance with article 4 of the Convention. The process was completed ahead of schedule and was overseen by the President of the Republic himself. This shows the importance which the highest levels in our country attach to this issue.

At the sixth Conference of the Parties held in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, in November 2005 - and we thank Croatia for hosting it - we were able to assess the progress made in implementing the Nairobi Plan of Action, 2005-2009, on ending the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines. While the results are generally good, they are not sufficient. A total of 149 States are parties to the Convention. Over 38 million mines have been destroyed so far by States parties. Better health, psychological, social and economic assistance is being provided to victims, and we must not forget the funds provided by donor countries to help affected States, as well as the demining that has been carried out in many areas. So, there is cause for optimism on the international front. There has been a marked reduction in the use, production and transfer of such mines. Some States that are not parties to the Convention have committed themselves to certain standards set forth therein. My delegation would like to thank all the States non-parties that have voluntarily submitted reports on transparency measures. We hope that these steps will lead to the ratification of the Convention.

The fact that we are citing these positive results does not imply that everything is perfect. There are still 46 States that remain outside the Convention, including 22 States which are members of our Conference. The number of victims every year remains high. According to the 2005 report of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, there are between 15,000 and 20,000 victims every year. These victims are found in about 98 countries, including States non-parties to the Convention. Moreover, according to a study on victims in 13 countries, 96 per cent of victims are civilians and 24 per cent are children below 15 years of age. These mines are still found in large tracts of land across 45 States, which are parties to the Treaty, and in 10 which are not.

The scale of the challenge and the nobility of the objective cause us to insist on the importance of achieving universality. Most of the affected States are developing countries, and by adhering to the Convention they have shown their willingness to put an end to this scourge.

(Mr. Khelif, Algeria)

They clearly want to abide by all their commitments within the set deadlines. However, the road ahead is still long. Lack of financial resources and technical human and institutional capacity may hamper their efforts. The Zagreb meeting showed that the implementation of the Convention is hostage to the availability of resources, particularly as far as mine clearance and assistance to victims are concerned. We therefore call on donor States to do more to provide the necessary aid and technical assistance, in accordance with article 6 of the Convention.

The fact that many States remain outside the Ottawa Convention truly undermines its effectiveness in serving the victims of these mines and the humanitarian and noble objectives embodied therein.

I reiterate my country's appeal to all the States that have not already done so to join the Convention as soon as possible, and before the Second Review Conference scheduled for 2009, in pursuance of the Millennium Development Goals.

In conclusion, we hope that all the members of the Conference will work together, following the example of the Ottawa Convention, to break the stalemate at the Conference in order to achieve international peace and security.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Khelif, the representative of Algeria, for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Australia, Mr. Craig Maclachlan.

Mr. MACLACHLAN (Australia): Mr. President, in the seven years since the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty, the international community has made great progress in ridding the world of these heinous weapons. At the heart of this success lies the partnership between the 149 States parties and the global NGO community. Working together we have eliminated more than 63 million stockpiled mines in recent years, cleared lands vital to the development of impoverished regions and assisted victims in rebuilding lives shattered by the violence of a misplaced step.

Australia is greatly encouraged that a norm against landmines is becoming increasingly evident in the declining use of landmines by States and non-State actors. But too many States are not party to the treaty; too much land remains affected by landmines. And innocents are still falling victim to landmines.

In the week we mark International Women's Day, we acknowledge the particular pain and suffering of women affected directly and indirectly by the trauma of landmines. Landmines have an especially cruel impact on the economic welfare and social status of women and girls, often the most vulnerable in society. Yet women also play an indispensable role in countering the threat of landmines, whether locally, nationally or internationally.

Australia has renewed its commitment to the campaign against landmines with an increased pledge of \$75 million over the next five years. These funds will be directed through a new mine action strategy focusing on assisting mine-affected countries in our region and supporting landmine survivors and affected communities. And as President designate of the seventh Meeting of States parties, Australia hopes to build on the success of Croatia's presidency in bringing us all closer to ending the suffering caused by landmines.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Australia, Mr. Craig Maclachlan, for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Austria, Mr. Markus Reiterer.

Mr. REITERER (Austria): Mr. President, since this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor under your presidency allow me at the outset to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of our full support and cooperation. I would also like to express my gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Rapacki of Poland, who spared no effort to advance our common cause and guide the Conference on Disarmament out of its deadlock. I would also like to take this opportunity to convey our best wishes to Ambassador Tim Caughley of New Zealand for his future endeavours and we will be very happy to see him back in Geneva in due course.

On Wednesday 1 March the world celebrated the seventh anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention.

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention is a prime example of how civil society and States can work together in a spirit of partnership, transparency and cooperation. The remarkable success of the Convention shows that multilateral cooperation can yield results if it is done with a clear focus and in a cooperative spirit.

In 2004 Austria had the privilege of presiding over the Convention's first Review Conference, the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-free World. We are encouraged to see that in furtherance of the objectives and aims of the Nairobi Action Plan, the Zagreb progress report was welcomed last year by the sixth Meeting of States Parties. The Zagreb progress report measured the achievements made in the first year of operation of the Nairobi Action Plan, and likewise, the report clearly highlights priority areas for the States parties, the Co-Chairs and the Convention's President in the run-up to the seventh Meeting of the States Parties. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Government of Croatia for a successful presidency of the sixth Meeting of States Parties and an excellent hosting in the city of Zagreb. We believe it was an important signal that the Meeting of States Parties was held in a mine-affected country in Europe.

Today we can celebrate considerable progress. Not only has the use of anti-personnel mines been markedly reduced in recent years, but also fewer anti-personnel mines are being produced, and trade in this perilous weapon has almost completely ceased. The annual number of mine victims is once again significantly reduced, and many landmine survivors are now receiving better care and assistance. One hundred and forty-nine States have ratified the Convention and have accepted the comprehensive approach to end the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines for all people for all time.

Austria remains determined to secure the achievements to date, to contribute to further strengthening cooperation under the Convention and to spare no effort to meet the challenges ahead of us. Let me close by calling upon all those States that are not yet party to the Convention to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Austria, Mr. Reiterer. I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia, Mr. Yusri.

Mr. WAN AZNAINIZAM YUSRI (Malaysia): Mr. President, Malaysia is also taking the floor to join others who have spoken earlier on the commemoration of the seventh anniversary of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines. Allow me at the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Malaysia, to place on record our congratulations to Croatia for the excellent work they did as the President of the sixth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention.

The Mine Ban Convention is important because it provides the legal basis for the prohibition of all anti-personnel landmines internationally. The Convention further provides the global community with a framework of international cooperation in mine clearance and destruction and in the economic and social rehabilitation of the victims of this inhumane weapon. The Mine Ban Convention remains, in Malaysia's view, the main international instrument for dealing with the problem of anti-personnel mines in a comprehensive and conclusive manner.

Since its entry into force seven years ago, we have witnessed significant progress. Malaysia is encouraged by the fact that more than 38 million mines have been destroyed, a considerable amount of land has been cleared of mines, and mine action funding has been increasing significantly over the years. More importantly, public awareness in fighting against the use of mines has also improved tremendously since the Convention entered into force in 1997. Malaysia hopes this positive trend will continue in the years to come.

Malaysia remains committed to the attainment of a truly universal ban on anti-personnel mines and the universalization of the Mine Ban Convention. In conjunction with the seventh anniversary of this Convention, we would like to reiterate our strong call to all the non-State parties that continue to use, develop and produce anti-personnel mines, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region, to cease doing so immediately and join the Mine Ban Convention. We believe this will significantly contribute to international peace and stability.

Before I conclude, allow me, on behalf of the delegation of Malaysia, to join others in bidding farewell to Ambassador Tim Caughley and wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Yusri of Malaysia and now give the floor to Ambassador Glaudine Mtshali of South Africa.

Ms. MTSHALI (South Africa): Mr. President, at the outset, since this is the first time I am taking the floor during your presidency, I wish to add my congratulations on your assumption of the presidency, but please do allow me to divert for one moment from my statement.

It is well known that the United Nations Security Council has recognized the important role of women in conflict situations by passing a resolution, and I believe it is 1325. It is therefore very disappointing that within the Conference on Disarmament, despite the wide support that had been given to hearing the voice of a representative of the women's groups

(Ms. Mtshali, South Africa)

during the celebration of International Women's Day on the important contributions that civil society, and particularly women, can make to the debate on nuclear disarmament, a different decision was reached. South Africa will continue to encourage a different approach and a more inclusive one to this matter.

Please allow me to add my voice to those who have spoken before me to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention on 1 March. The question of anti-personnel landmines has been an important issue for South Africa, even before the entry into force of the Convention in 1999. As I am sure members of this Conference are aware, Africa is one of the continents which has suffered greatly as a result of the use of anti-personnel landmines. A significant proportion of the large numbers of innocent victims of anti-personnel landmines are to be found in the rural areas of those parts of Africa that have suffered civil war and strife over the past decades.

Despite the numerous challenges associated with the landmine problem, experience has taught us that the many difficulties are not insurmountable and that measurable success can be achieved through careful planning, dedication and the necessary political will.

In this regard, South Africa strongly believes that the Mine Ban Treaty has irreversibly established itself as the international norm in banning anti-personnel mines. The universalization of the Convention still remains a priority, and South Africa therefore calls upon all those States that have not yet banned anti-personnel mines to demonstrate the necessary political will to do so.

The future challenge is to ensure that the high profile of the Mine Ban Treaty is maintained. Failure to maintain the momentum will in all probability lead to a focus on other issues not related to anti-personnel landmines. This would have a negative impact on the humanitarian aspects of the treaty, which require long-term commitments on the part of the international community to victim assistance and mine-clearing programmes. Because these weapons continue to be the cause of death and destruction long after their military utility has ceased, we must not allow the issue of APMs to become a victim of the information age, where something remains important only until such time as something else comes along.

In conclusion, South Africa views the 2006 Meeting of States Parties later this year as an opportunity to further highlight the importance of the Mine Ban Treaty and to accelerate its implementation and universalization to achieve the vision of a world free from anti-personnel mines.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Mtshali of South Africa for her statement and her kind words addressed to the Chair, and also for the invaluable suggestions concerning International Women's Day. I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina, Mr. Marcelo Valle Fonrouge.

Mr. VALLE FONROUGE (Argentina) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you and say how pleased we are that you have taken the Chair of this Conference and assure you of our support for your endeavours in addressing substantive issues.

(Mr. Valle Fonrouge, Argentina)

Like other delegations, we have asked for the floor to join in commemorating one more anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines and Their Destruction.

This statement is aimed at showing, from our regional perspective, the achievements gained in the framework of this Convention. From this perspective, I wish to state first of all how pleased we are at the recent ratification by Haiti on 15 February 2006.

Latin America is the region with the highest level of membership of this Convention. In our hemisphere only two countries remain outside the Convention. The proclamation of Mercosur (encompassing Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Chile) as a zone of peace in 1998 declared the region a zone free of anti-personnel mines and seeks to extend this to the entire hemisphere in keeping with the resolutions of the Organization of American States in this area.

I will briefly set out some of the steps aimed at strengthening this Convention as undertaken by Argentina at the regional level. In March 2004, Argentina took part in work under the mine action programme of the Organization of American States in Colombia because it is of the view that this strengthens cooperation with countries of the hemisphere while at the same time complying with the objectives of the Convention, in accordance with article 6 on cooperation and assistance.

Argentina has been supporting the work being done by the United Nations and major partners such as the International Red Cross and non-governmental organizations such as ICBL and Geneva Call to secure the involvement of non-State actors in promoting the standards set out in the Convention as a whole. In our country international seminars on demining continue to be held, attended by States from within our region and outside, such as the Republic of Lebanon. As for measures of cooperation and international assistance, Argentina and Chile have set up a working group on education for the population living in the border regions on the hazards of mine accidents. With respect to multilateral transparency, Argentina and Chile incorporated into the Convention the possibility of reporting on plans for the use of mines retained for purposes of training in the national reports of States parties to the Convention.

The Argentine Republic hopes that this regional experience will strengthen the perception of this Convention as a security guarantee for other regions so as to facilitate coordinated and effective action by the international community as we move towards a world free from anti-personnel mines. It should be emphasized that this Convention provides an additional instrument for accommodating differences, in both the civilian and military spheres, as it sets a higher humanitarian objective and a framework for joint work. At the same time, it is an important confidence-building measure that implies cooperation among the countries of the region in the area of demining.

In short, eradication of this scourge in the region has joined rejection by the region of the possession of weapons of mass destruction. It is my hope that these achievements in our region will be reflected in other regions so that step by step, region by region, we will be able to achieve a world free of weapons that affect progress in international humanitarian law and security for all.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Valle Fonrouge of Argentina and now give the floor to Ambassador Meyer of Canada.

Mr. MEYER (Canada): It is a great pleasure to join others here and around the world in marking the seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty (the Ottawa Convention).

In December of 1997, the Convention was opened for signature in Ottawa. On that historic occasion it was signed by 122 nations. The Convention entered into force on 1 March 1999, and seven years later, 149 countries - almost 80 per cent of the world's nations - have ratified or acceded to it. Many others have adopted its norms, and implementation of the Convention is well under way.

The international community has generated more than \$2 billion for mine action in the past decade. Almost 40 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed, vast tracts of land have been cleared and returned to productive use, and the needs of many thousands of landmine survivors and their families have been met.

Production of anti-personnel mines has dropped dramatically and official trade in this weapon has virtually ended. The last edition of Landmine Monitor cites evidence of only four governments laying new anti-personnel mines in recent years. Most important of all, the number of landmine victims has been reduced to between 15,000 and 20,000 per year from approximately double that number when the Convention came into being. This is human security in action!

But our work is far from over. Ultimately the promise of this Convention will not be fulfilled until anti-personnel mines have claimed their last victim, and the lethal barrier they present to the pursuit of a better life has been eliminated in all countries and for all time.

On this anniversary, Canada reaffirms its commitment to work with other nations and our multilateral and civil-society partners to make this goal a reality.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Meyer of Canada for his statement and I now give the floor to Ambassador Jürg Streuli of Switzerland.

Mr. STREULI (Switzerland) (translated from French): It has been seven years now since the Ottawa Convention entered into force, and this anniversary, marked on 1 March, reminds us that although considerable progress has already been made to combat the scourge of anti-personnel mines, major challenges remain and we must be persistent in our efforts.

One hundred and forty-nine countries have already joined together with many non-governmental organizations and major leading international organizations, such as ICRC and the United Nations, in pursuit of the dream that one day they will be able to announce: no new victims. To achieve this goal, we must continue to work to ensure that there are no more mines in villages, on roads, near water sources, schools, hospitals, or in fields, by allocating

(Mr. Streuli, Switzerland)

sufficient resources to this effort and using them in a coordinated and targeted manner. This is why the Swiss Government has pledged to sustain its present effort in the years to come in order to help affected countries to prevent accidents, alleviate suffering and clear affected territories.

From 18 to 22 September this year, Switzerland will host the seventh conference of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention in Geneva. This will provide an opportunity to measure the progress achieved in implementing the Nairobi Plan of Action since the Zagreb conference in 2005, particularly with regard to the five main areas of anti-mine action: universalization of the Convention, raising awareness of the risks posed by mines, destruction of stockpiles, mine clearance, and assistance to victims.

This last aspect is of fundamental importance for the future and remains a priority for Switzerland, because the survivors of anti-personnel mines will require assistance for the rest of their lives. It is necessary to work in the long term in this field because assistance for victims does not end with their rehabilitation but demands constant support for their social and economic reintegration. Switzerland is fully aware of this need and of the huge challenge it faces as it takes up this year, together with Afghanistan, the joint chairmanship of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration. In this context, the co-Chairs will continue their predecessors' efforts to ensure that the objectives laid down are met in order to promote access to high-quality medical care, improve the social and economic reintegration of survivors and help the most affected countries to implement national plans to meet these needs.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention and acknowledge with thanks the work of the International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in Geneva, which, with its Implementation Support Unit, makes a crucial contribution to the development and implementation of the Convention.

In conclusion, I would also like to emphasize that the use of anti-personnel mines by non-State armed groups remains a major challenge that needs to be addressed. Switzerland is continuing to study this matter and would like to highlight the key role played by non-governmental organizations such as Geneva Call and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, in striving to persuade such groups not to use these weapons.

Finally, I would like to thank you and congratulate you, Mr. President, as well as your team, for your far-sightedness in guiding the work of the Conference and to assure you of my country's support.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Streuli for his statement and his kind encouragement addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, Mr. Thomas Cynkin.

Mr. CYNKIN (United States of America): The United States, which plays a major role in global demining efforts, has proposed in the Conference on Disarmament a ban on the sale or export of all persistent landmines. This proposal is meant to complement, not to conflict with, the Mine Ban Treaty. As the Conference on Disarmament considers means of constructing a programme of work, we ask that delegations seriously consider taking up this proposal.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Cynkin of the United States for his statement. I now give the floor to Ambassador Glaudine Mtshali of South Africa.

Ms. MTSHALI (South Africa): Thank you for giving me the floor a second time this morning to also address the issue of nuclear disarmament.

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement on nuclear disarmament delivered by Iraq on 28 February 2006 on behalf of the Group of 21.

As members of the Conference are aware, South Africa is a proponent of nuclear disarmament and a great supporter of a nuclear-weapon-free world. In this regard, the views of my country on the important issue of nuclear disarmament have already on a number of occasions been expressed in this Conference, as well as in other multilateral disarmament forums.

My delegation has followed the debate on nuclear disarmament under your presidency with keen interest. From what most speakers have said, it would seem as though there is little disagreement that the possibility that nuclear weapons could be used represents a real and a continued risk to humanity. It therefore appears obvious that the only absolute guarantee against the use of such weapons is their complete elimination and the assurance that they will never be produced again.

South Africa believes that the continued possession of nuclear weapons or the retention of the nuclear weapons option by some States by definition creates the real danger that they may be used, as well as the possibility of these weapons falling into the hands of non-State actors. The complete elimination of nuclear weapons and the assurance that they will never be produced again therefore remains the only assurance against their use. We believe that this should remain our ultimate goal. South Africa furthermore believes that any presumption of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States is incompatible with the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as with the broader goal of the maintenance of international peace and security.

During the course of our discussions on the issue of nuclear disarmament, various delegations have referred to important issues such as transparency, irreversibility and the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines, to mention but a few aspects of the nuclear disarmament debate. As members of the Conference are aware, South Africa gave up the nuclear weapons option and destroyed a nuclear deterrent capability.

In South Africa's view, nuclear disarmament is not part of some "ultimate" objective, but a milestone to be reached on the way to the real objective of the disarmament process, namely general and complete disarmament. Furthermore, the onus to effect nuclear disarmament primarily rests on those States that possess such weapons.

Of late much has been said about the threat of nuclear proliferation. In this regard, I wish to re-emphasize South Africa's view that the issues of nuclear disarmament and nuclear

(Ms. Mtshali, South Africa)

non-proliferation are inextricably linked, and both therefore require continuous and irreversible progress. As long as some countries have nuclear weapons, there will be others who will always aspire to possess them.

My delegation believes that we ignore the interrelationship between nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation at our own peril. The longer nuclear weapons exist, the longer the world will have to wait to be free from the use or the threat of use of such weapons, and the longer the devastation of another Hiroshima or Nagasaki will remain possible. Clearly, this cannot be what we want.

In South Africa's view, there can be no doubt that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is vital in order to achieve nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. It remains the only international instrument that not only strives to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also contains a legal commitment for their elimination. In this context we also recall that the Treaty represents a historical bargain between the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States in terms of which the non-nuclear-weapon States have undertaken not to aspire to nuclear weapons based upon the reciprocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

To quote from the words of South Africa's late Foreign Minister, Mr. Alfred Nzo, at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, "South Africa took the decision to destroy its nuclear weapons and to become a State party to the NPT because we saw our security being guaranteed by its provisions." For South Africa, the NPT remains the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation and we will continue to promote universal adherence to it.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to remind all of us of the urgent need to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear weapons, which would surely greatly enhance global peace and security. As a step towards attaining this goal, we would once more urge the Conference on Disarmament to establish a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament without further delay.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Mtshali of South Africa for her statement. I now have the following list of speakers waiting to take the floor: the Syrian Arab Republic, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Belarus, Ireland, Egypt and Colombia. The next speaker is Mr. Hussein Ali of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. ALI (Syrian Arab Republic) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, first of all, I wish to commend you for your untiring efforts to achieve progress at the Conference. I would also like to express my delegation's regret that representatives of women's NGOs did not have a chance to address the Conference directly. This is frustrating, especially as the States that objected to their participation are the same States that call on us every day to strengthen the participation of civil society in efforts to maintain security and peace, to build and promote democracy and to strengthen human rights. These States seem to wish NGOs to be tools of their own policies, which is regrettable.

(Mr. Ali, Syrian Arab Republic)

Over the past few weeks it has become apparent that some delegations are of the view that progress can be made on issues of priority for them by manoeuvring, ducking and diving and ignoring the priorities of other countries and what other delegations say. A word of advice to them. Don't waste your time or the Conference's time. The best way to make progress is to work sincerely and transparently, respecting the security concerns of all member States.

Some delegations have talked about confidence-building among member States. We agree with them; there is a crisis of confidence. Some nuclear-weapon States have not only departed from their prior commitments but continue to develop their existing weapons and create new types of weapons, refusing even to discuss the issue of negative security assurances. They even persist in refusing to discuss the establishment of an ad hoc body not to negotiate, but merely to discuss, nuclear disarmament. This worries us considerably and shows that there is a crisis of confidence. Indeed, this crisis is aggravated by what His Excellency the Ambassador of France said at one of the meetings on nuclear disarmament, namely, that the establishment of an ad hoc body of this nature was "manoeuvring". This crisis of confidence must be overcome if we are to make progress. This crisis is a question of the faith member States have in the principles of the Charter and the norms of international law.

Although last week was devoted to a discussion of nuclear disarmament and although there is another week for discussion of the fissile material cut-off, some delegations have anticipated matters by raising the issue of fissile material. Here, I should like to mention what the Ambassador of France said. He said that he was convinced of the need to begin negotiations on an FMCT without any prior conditions and, at the same time, he listed three conditions. He said that the convention should not include existing stockpiles, that it should not cover materials for military use other than explosive materials and, thirdly, that it should not refer to a verification mechanism. This is rather perplexing. How can these conditions be described? Are these prior conditions?

His Excellency the Ambassador of the United Kingdom expressed the view that the purpose of the FMCT should be to prevent States that do not possess fissile material from manufacturing or possessing fissile material. The question here is: what criteria apply? We work in the framework of the United Nations, and one of the basic principles of the Charter is equal sovereignty of States. Equal sovereignty implies equal rights and obligations. Consequently, the question of possession or production of fissile material, and here I digress - I would like to point out that my country does not have a nuclear programme or any nuclear, military or political ambitions in this respect, but I am discussing a matter of principle. If the production of fissile material is illegal, then its acquisition should be prohibited for all States. If the production of this material is legal, then all States that wish to do so should be able to acquire it, or at least there should be a consensus on ways of gaining access to it.

On 31 January 2006, His Excellency the Ambassador of the Netherlands quoted the late President John Kennedy of the United States, who said: "We cannot negotiate with those who say, 'What's mine is mine, and what's yours is negotiable'." The quotation delighted me, because it aptly describes the approach followed by some delegations to dealing with an FMCT and other issues on the Conference agenda.

(Mr. Ali, Syrian Arab Republic)

However, I must admit that the Ambassador of the Netherlands left me feeling depressed when he said, on Tuesday, that the deliberations in the preceding weeks had shown that the positions of regional groups on the FMCT were getting closer. I followed the deliberations, we all did. One can easily infer from the support given to different items on the agenda that 40 States were of the view that nuclear disarmament is a priority for them and for international peace and security, whereas only 10 States called for negotiations on the FMCT.

The delegations calling for a treaty are of the view that the subject is ripe for discussion. The ripeness of a subject is something that cannot be established, just because some claim to consider it right. There must be objective factors that allow one to determine that the time is indeed ripe for such a discussion. I would call on those who make this claim to tell us what criteria they used to arrive at this determination regarding fissile material.

If we agree on a certain number of criteria for establishing whether or not the time is ripe for discussion of an issue, we could apply the same criteria to the four core issues on the agenda. Our position, as like the position of the Group of 21, is that the four core issues on the agenda should be addressed in the framework of a comprehensive and balanced programme of action. If the agreed evaluation process shows that one particular issue is more ripe than another, then we will begin working on that issue separately.

We could begin this process and we would have more time between the first and the second parts of the Conference to reach agreement on criteria and the evaluation methodology.

We could discuss some criteria or factors that determine whether a topic is ripe for discussion. If we had applied the criterion of time, for example, delegations which support the discussion of an FMCT would say that the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences recommended the initiation of negotiations on an FMCT. That is indeed true. However, the first resolution which the United Nations General Assembly adopted at its very first sessions was on nuclear weapons. Fifty years have now gone by - not exactly a short period of time - half a century stands between the time when there was first talk of the need for nuclear disarmament and the current discussion of the issue of fissile material. We call on States to deal with priorities in a comprehensive and not a selective fashion. One cannot address the recommendations on an FMCT and ignore everything else. There are also recommendations on nuclear disarmament. We cannot pick and choose between recommendations.

There are other evaluation criteria, such as legal references. Here I would like to mention the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice regarding the need for negotiations on nuclear disarmament, and the succession of General Assembly resolutions on nuclear disarmament that have been adopted every year since the first session.

Most delegations support the idea of negotiations on an FMCT, viewing it as a first step towards nuclear disarmament. We agree with this. This being so, why not create a single ad hoc subsidiary body to negotiate on nuclear disarmament, including fissile material, without any prior conditions? We would leave it up to that subsidiary body to proceed in keeping with the mechanisms and priorities that that body considers useful. That would not conflict with the sentiments expressed by delegations in this forum.

(Mr. Ali, Syrian Arab Republic)

Lastly, I would refer to the points made by His Excellency the United Kingdom Ambassador, who said, before the structured discussions, that such discussions should underscore the fact that an FMCT is a topic that is ripe for negotiation. Those comments made me think about what was said by a president, a head of State, whose country we respect, following an attempted coup. He was asked: "What are you going to do with the conspirators?" He said: "We will sentence them to death after a fair trial."

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Hussein Ali, for his statement and kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to Ambassador Itzhak Levanon of Israel.

Mr. LEVANON (Israel): Mr. President, let me congratulate you on your assumption of this important position and commend you on the way you are conducting our discussions. Let me assure you of my delegation's full support in your endeavours.

I would like to avail myself of the opportunity also to express our gratitude to your predecessor, Ambassador Zdzisław Rapacki of Poland, for his tireless efforts, thanks to which, after so many years of stagnation, the Conference on Disarmament is holding constructive discussions.

The schedule of activities that has been elaborated by the P6 for this year is an encouraging step in the right direction. Let me express my satisfaction that time has been allocated to the new issues which were presented by France, Switzerland and Australia. I can assure you that my delegation will take an active part in the discussions on these important and appropriate issues.

Since we are in the phase of general statements according to points 1 and 2 of our agenda, I would like today to present my country's views on the issue of nuclear disarmament.

Israel's approach to the question of disarmament is driven by a regional and global perspective. Due to the political contingencies in the Middle East, Israel is compelled to adapt its global approach to its regional situation.

The Government of Israel adopted its vision on the long-term goals for regional security in the Middle East in 1992. It included the following statement: "In the spirit of the global pursuit of general and complete disarmament, Israel will endeavour, upon the establishment of relations of peace in our part of the world, that the States of the region should, jointly, establish a mutually verifiable zone free of ground-to-ground missiles, of chemical and biological weapons and of nuclear weapons."

Practically, Israel believes that the political circumstances in the Middle East require a step-by-step approach. The first step in the process should be modest confidence-building measures, followed by the establishment of lasting peaceful relations based on reconciliation, good neighbourliness, open borders and trust among nations. This will be followed, when conditions are ripe, by negotiations on regional security arrangements, and eventually complemented by conventional and non-conventional arms control measures.

(Mr. Levanon, Israel)

Unfortunately, the recent repetitive calls by the President of Iran to wipe my country off the map are not contributing to achieving that goal.

Given the slow progress that might be envisaged in regional disarmament, dealing with non-proliferation challenges on a global scale is of great importance. In doing so, great consideration should be given to the growing energy needs of the world.

Faithful to this logic, Israel joins the consensus every year on the resolutions regarding the creation of a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. To have such a common regional vision of disarmament and non-proliferation is, in our opinion, a confidence-building measure per se.

Such a zone should be based on arrangements to be freely reached among all States in the region concerned. My country believes that such a zone can only be established through direct negotiations between the States of the region, including those directly concerned.

I would like to stress that while States and terrorist organizations in our region call for the destruction of Israel, and while proliferation and the development of weapons of mass destruction continue in the absence of any dialogue on regional security, calls for substantive discussion on disarmament are ill-timed.

As I have already mentioned in different forums, in its effort to strengthen global stability, peace and security, the international community needs to choose adequate tools, based on reality and existing challenges. Non-compliance of countries with their legal obligations, the need to strengthen existing non-proliferation regimes, the promotion of a moratorium on nuclear testing and last but not least the proliferation of fuel cycle technologies are such challenges.

In the current state of affairs, confronting the challenges that we are facing today, we believe that more substantive weight should be given to global non-proliferation efforts. Moreover, the conceptual and traditional link between progress in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation could be revisited. In our opinion, these are two issues of a different nature that should be conceptually and practically delinked.

The developments of the last few years, primarily with Iran in our region and also in Far East Asia, have clearly demonstrated that the proliferation of fuel cycle technologies can become a global danger since they can easily be diverted to illicit and clandestine military purposes.

It is our responsibility as members of the international community to ensure that States acting in bad faith should be prevented from exploiting the loopholes existing in current regimes and norms. Such States, by doing so, are limiting the access of members of the international community who are acting in good faith to the benefits of nuclear energy.

The right of countries to peaceful nuclear energy is not questioned. In this context, we would like to stress the importance of, and express our support to, the different initiatives on the fuel cycle. These initiatives are directed at increasing global energy security while reducing the

(Mr. Levanon, Israel)

risk of nuclear proliferation, namely President Bush's initiative, the G8 initiative and recently President Putin's initiative, as presented by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation before the Conference on Disarmament.

In our view, the international community needs to invest its efforts in such initiatives.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Levanon of Israel for his statement and warm words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to Ambassador Yoshiki Mine of Japan.

Mr. MINE (Japan): Mr. President, it is my great pleasure to present our views on FMCT when this week marks International Women's Day. It is one of the items to which not only member States but also many NGOs attach importance, as was indicated in the statement you read out a few minutes ago.

Our discussions on nuclear disarmament under your guidance have highlighted several points of importance concerning nuclear disarmament, and your four topics have provided us with useful benchmarks for further deliberations. Now FMCT as a subject will be taken up in the focused debate scheduled this May under the guidance of the new President. I hope that by sharing some preliminary views on substantive points of importance regarding FMCT it will help facilitate a more effective focused debate in May.

I will now skip a few paragraphs in view of the time constraints and the long list of those who are waiting to speak.

To begin with, with the exception of one nuclear-weapon State, four nuclear-weapon States party to the NPT have declared moratoria on fissile material production for nuclear weapons. Since the end of the cold war, the worldwide stockpile of fissile materials for weapons purposes has remained the same. According to ISIS data for 2003, it is estimated there exists about 155 tons of plutonium and 1,725 tons of HEU. We should bear in mind that the moratorium is only a voluntary declaration of intention and is not legally binding. Appropriate control of this enormous amount of fissile material for weapons guarantees non-proliferation, caps production that ensures nuclear disarmament, increases transparency and, needless to recall, is important for tackling the threat of fissile material falling into the hands of terrorists.

At present, a number of international treaties and frameworks, such as the NPT, IAEA, the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, address fissile material. However, in reality these international treaties and frameworks lack any form of mandatory oversight on production, physical protection, transfer prohibitions or safeguards regarding fissile material for nuclear weapons, leaving fissile material - in other words - "off the leash".

Certainly, we expect nuclear-weapon States that possess fissile material for nuclear weapons to enforce appropriate and strict controls, but those controls are national measures and are not, in any way, subject to international guarantees and obligations.

(Mr. Mine, Japan)

An FMCT, by elaborating the contents of obligations, as well as through verification or safeguard measures, can fill, to some extent, these “gaps in the existing treaties and framework” in relation to fissile material for nuclear weapons.

In order to make the focused, structured debate on an FMCT as fruitful as possible, Japan intends to submit a working paper on FMCT. The working paper will examine the existing international treaties and frameworks while affirming the present-day significance of the FMCT. Although we are still working on the paper, I would like to touch upon and introduce some new possible elements of our new paper.

Building upon the paper we submitted in 2003 (CD/1714), our new paper will reconsider the significance of an FMCT in the light of its “relevance” to the current international security environment. The paper will then, taking into consideration various positions, provide some thoughts on appropriate options.

Now I will turn to some of the highlights of our paper. Firstly, in the light of the great need to strengthen control, such as physical protection, over nuclear materials against possible theft or use by non-State actors, an FMCT remains just as relevant to the current international security environment as ever before. Since there is no international legal framework for such nuclear security on fissile materials for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices, there is ample opportunity for an FMCT to play a role in this critical area of nuclear security: for example, by obligating States in possession of such materials to strictly implement physical protection over fissile materials for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices.

Secondly, the concept of verification under an FMCT may be classified into four or five categories. The categories to verify States parties’ compliance with their obligation under an FMCT not to produce fissile materials for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices would be:

- (1) Confirm that the stockpile of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices has not increased;
- (2) Confirm that nuclear materials for non-nuclear-weapons purposes have not been diverted to nuclear-weapons purposes. This category can be divided into two subcategories:
 - (2.1) Confirm that nuclear materials for peaceful purposes have not been diverted to nuclear-weapons purposes;
 - (2.2) Confirm that nuclear materials for conventional military purposes have not been diverted to nuclear-weapons purposes;
- (3) Confirm that the facilities for the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices that are closed down or decommissioned before/after the entry into force of the FMCT remain closed down or decommissioned;

(Mr. Mine, Japan)

- (4) Confirm that fissile materials a State party has voluntarily declared excess as a result of nuclear disarmament or a review of its security policy are not reverted back for nuclear-weapons purposes.

Thus, when we discuss the verifiability of an FMCT, or for that matter the feasibility of any verification category, we need to draw a clear distinction as to which category we are talking about. Accordingly, even if one verification category seems difficult to integrate into an FMCT, other categories may still be feasible and necessary, thereby assisting to solve the debates over the necessity or viability of verification.

In particular, we would like to draw attention to the concept of “safeguards” under the NPT, which falls into aforementioned category 2.1, that is, the second confirmation which has been divided into two (to confirm non-diversion from peaceful purposes to nuclear-weapons purposes). I would like to note that the nuclear-weapons States and two non-NPT member States have already placed some of their nuclear materials and facilities for peaceful purposes under IAEA safeguards. I would also like to point out that we could learn from the Trilateral Initiative between the United States, the Russian Federation and IAEA, which falls into category 4 which I mentioned. Thus, reviewing the issue of verification in the light of the concept of “safeguards” would be useful.

Thirdly, when we discuss “existing stocks”, we should clearly delineate between which type of “existing stocks” we are talking about and what obligations should be imposed on them. For example, “existing stocks” can be divided into several different categories: (a) existing stocks of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices; (b) existing stocks for peaceful purposes; (c) existing stocks for conventional military purposes; (d) existing stocks that possibly remain in closed-down or decommissioned facilities; and finally, (e) existing stocks that have been voluntarily declared excess for nuclear weapons.

Obligations under an FMCT can also be categorized into several categories, as follows: (i) a ban on production; (ii) mandatory or voluntary declarations; (iii) mandatory verification (or safeguards) measures; (iv) a ban on transfer; and (v) obligations on nuclear security (accounting and control, physical protection, etc.). The examination of each category of “existing stocks” and each type of obligation, taking into account the achievability of a treaty, would thus facilitate discussions on what to do with “existing stocks”.

Turning our attention now to the FMCT session, we believe that (i) the scope, including the management of existing stocks (core obligations), (ii) verification or safeguards and (iii) the definition of fissile material (what materials will be the objection of regulation) will become the focused subtopics for discussion. In addition, we consider the other items, such as future organization, the entry-into-force clause, amendment, withdrawal and the review process are also essential for drawing up the treaty, but currently they only constitute minor issues. We believe the three former issues ought to remain the main emphasis. For Japan, verification or safeguards and the management of existing stocks need a minimum of two sessions each, and definitions of fissile materials need one focused session. Therefore, including the other items, at least six sessions are required.

(Mr. Mine, Japan)

Considering the technical nature of the matter, it is obvious that the participation of experts is extremely important for enhancing the effectiveness of discussions on an FMCT. Appropriately, during the May session, Japan plans to dispatch its own experts, and we encourage other countries to do the same. Through the input of experts familiar with the technical issues, ostensibly a technical solution can be found to overcome the political problems.

Finally, I must point out that the above-mentioned ideas are at the early stage of our consideration, and once again we welcome comments and any positive contribution from other member States. In particular, participation by the nuclear-weapons States and non-NPT member States is naturally of vital importance and cannot be overstated. Consequently, regardless of the treatment of existing stocks, considering the effect of irreversibility, we believe that the FMCT is a nuclear disarmament measure. Moreover, it is also a nuclear non-proliferation measure in the sense that it controls and prevents the build-up of fissile material. With these things in mind, we call on all States desiring to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to accord the FMCT their highest priority.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Mine for his statement and preliminary introduction of his proposal. I now give the floor to Ambassador Tim Caughley of New Zealand.

Mr. CAUGHLEY (New Zealand): Mr. President, on this seventh anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention and the occasion on which we commemorate International Women's Day, let me thank you for the kind words that you and colleagues have said about me and my country.

It's been a sobering experience attending the Conference on Disarmament these past four years. It's often seemed to me that we are more concerned to air our differences than we are to find common ground. This is all the more perplexing if one accepts that the element we have most in common is our concern for something as fundamental as our national and collective security.

I would like to be able to say in my final report to my Government as I conclude my assignment today that slowly but surely we are getting to grips with that verity. Whether this is because collectively we have come to accept that the viability of this Conference is on the line or because several frustrated countries like mine laid down a particular challenge during the sixtieth General Assembly of the United Nations is not important. What is important is that this Conference has begun to take its own future much more squarely in its hands.

To my mind, evidence of a new sense of purpose is beginning to accumulate. It includes these factors:

Informal recognition throughout last year of the need for continuity between successive Presidents has found much more concrete expression in the collaboration that has already occurred this year.

(Mr. Caughley, New Zealand)

The development of a timetable for the entire working year represents a small but practical way in which to underpin this new Presidential continuity and at the same time help us to change up a gear in the CD.

The increased level of engagement and the tone of that engagement on all sides demonstrates, it seems to me, a new readiness to put not only the barren years behind us but a conscious effort across the membership to begin to try to compensate for the absence of an outcome on disarmament and arms control at last year's Summit of the United Nations.

The greater frequency with which we are meeting in this chamber and our readiness to hold our discussions on the record of the Conference augurs well for our future.

There seems to me also to be more widespread acceptance that the integrity of the CD depends not simply on how often we meet or how often we speak or how formal or well-structured our debates are or how flexibly we task our Friends of the President, but on what the results of this increased activity are.

And I sense that we are becoming progressively more relaxed about the latitude we allow our Presidents in exercising their Presidential prerogative. This flows logically from the greater degree of coordination amongst successive Presidents.

We must ask ourselves whether it also represents an increased level of trust in one another. I certainly hope so.

These are perhaps small beginnings, but cumulatively they may help us overcome our comparative lassitude and develop some momentum. We are coming to this chamber not just to listen but to interact. I am more hopeful than at any time during the past four years that the rhetoric that has marked our sessions is giving way to pragmatism. That as much as we would like to give prominence to the core or other issues to which we are particularly attached, we will have to proceed on a narrower front and in a more graduated way.

The litmus test of such momentum and pragmatism will lie in our collective readiness to bring more transparency to our proceedings, to greater inclusiveness of civil society including, I must add, access to our chamber for the authors of the annual Women's Day message and to our ability to put flesh on the bones of what at the working level we mean by "confidence-building measures".

And, more speculatively, I would hope that we would try to think of how we couch our programme of work in more simple terms than we have done in the past. We may not be able to develop a work programme that is devoid of constructive ambiguity, but that should not stop us from trying a minimalist approach to see whether we can find a way forward.

To my mind, a pragmatic programme of work is one that entails two parallel but not necessarily equal activities. The first is the negotiation of a treaty dealing with fissile materials in a subsidiary body whose mandate will be to draft and adopt an effective agreement to secure

(Mr. Caughley, New Zealand)

the discontinuation of the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices. I haven't used the words "without preconditions" because they in themselves are conditional. We believe FMCT is ripe for treatment because of the negotiating status given to it in the most widely supported proposals for our work programme.

The second parallel activity would be the discussion of mandates primarily but not exclusively for subsidiary bodies on nuclear disarmament, PAROS and negative security assurances. These discussions would be allocated such time as was necessary to ensure the effective treatment of these issues while leaving sufficient time for comprehensive and effective treatment of the first activity.

In other words, we would essentially rely on our negotiating skills after the adoption of the programme of work rather than, as now, trying to be overly prescriptive in advance. If it transpires that our latent energies are not consumed in negotiating an FMCT as a new vehicle for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, then it stands to reason that we will want to intensify our efforts on PAROS, NSAs or other aspects of nuclear disarmament.

I readily concede that this approach may be simplistic, but is it illogical? We'd like to hear a contrary view if there is one. In any event, the choice for the CD, it seems to my country, is getting down to work quickly on the basis of a simple recipe or becoming irrelevant. Given our collective investment in our national and international security, the latter prospect is one that is surely unthinkable. When I said earlier that our future is in our hands, I did not do so lightly.

For my part, I'll continue to be more than an interested observer in the work of the Conference, and I thank all colleagues and all those who underpin our work so expertly for their camaraderie and support during my time as New Zealand's representative to the CD.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Caughley for his statement and succinct analysis of the current situation in the CD. Now I give the floor to Mr. Kjetil Paulsen of Norway.

Mr. PAULSEN (Norway): Mr. President, just a couple of very, very brief remarks, first in relation to the Landmine Convention, to which my Government is fully committed. It is useful to recall today, I think, that in the early and mid-1990s, tireless efforts were made to commence negotiations on the convention within the Conference on Disarmament. These efforts, though, failed solidly. But the Convention was nevertheless successfully negotiated outside this chamber. A lesson to learn is that when there is a will, there is always a way, irrespective of the CD.

Secondly, once again we have today experienced the bizarre practice that the NGO statement in relation to International Women's Day had to be read out by an intermediary. It is as embarrassing as the general impasse of this Conference is.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Paulsen of Norway for his intervention. I now give the floor to Mr. Ivan Grinevich of Belarus.

Mr. GRINEVICH (Belarus) (translated from Russian): Mr. President, first of all I would like to sincerely wish you every success in your duties as President of the Conference on Disarmament. Belarus supports your efforts and also the efforts of your predecessor, the Ambassador of Poland, Zdzisław Rapacki, aimed at a resumption of fully-fledged work in the CD.

The seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines fell on 1 March. In this connection, allow me to confirm the commitment of Belarus to the ideas of the Ottawa process. Belarus is in favour of the universality of all existing international agreements on the mine problem, including Amended Protocol II and the Ottawa Convention. We believe that ensuring the universality of these instruments and their scrupulous observance by all parties to those agreements will lead to the elimination of the mine crisis.

On 2 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus circulated a statement which I feel it is essential to bring to the attention of the Conference on Disarmament. It reads as follows:

“The second anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines for the Republic of Belarus fell on 1 March 2006. Our country fully supports the purposes of the Ottawa Convention, and plans to destroy by 1 March 2008 all its existing stockpiles of anti-personnel mines which are prohibited by the provisions of that instrument. For the purposes of implementation of the Convention, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus have analysed and studied the experience of other States in eliminating mines. Negotiations have been held and agreements signed which will make it possible to secure international assistance for the elimination of stockpiles of anti-personnel mines in our country. In this connection, the Republic of Belarus expresses its gratitude to the Governments of Canada and Lithuania, which made a substantial contribution to the anti-personnel mine elimination project that began on 1 March 2006. Over the coming six months, the Ministry of Defence of Belarus, together with the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency, will eliminate approximately 300,000 anti-personnel mines. The destruction of the most dangerous type of liquid-filled mines of the PFM-1 type - of which there are more than 3 million in Belarus - is also planned this year under another international project together with the European Commission.”

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Belarus, Mr. Grinevich, for his statement and kind words addressed to the Chair, and I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland, Mr. Declan Smyth.

Mr. SMYTH (Ireland): Some weeks ago Ireland made a proposal to allow an NGO to deliver directly the statement that they had drafted for International Women's Day. This proposal received broad cross-group support. You, Mr. President, responded positively and

(Mr. Smyth, Ireland)

indicated that you proposed to seek to facilitate this request. However, today we have seen a repetition of the same sorry tradition of other years. The situation that we witnessed here today is at variance with good practice in the United Nations and in other disarmament forums. Here, a statement may be delivered, but not by those who drafted it. They are to remain silent, seen but not heard. That this should be regarded as a fitting way to celebrate International Women's Day is a travesty and an insult. But the manner in which the wish of those who supported the Irish proposal was ignored is also a travesty. A proposal was made by a member of this Conference. It was supported by a large number of speakers. No member spoke against it. What rule of procedure was used to deal with this matter? I can only presume that some member or members believed that consensus equates with a veto, a silent veto. We can only presume that some members let the Chair know that they could not agree to this modest step into the real world, but they have not sought to explain their position to this forum.

Last week Ireland spoke on the subject of transparency in nuclear disarmament. Transparency in the manner in which this Conference works is clearly an even more difficult objective to achieve.

We thank the United States delegation for circulating today Secretary of State Rice's statement on International Women's Day. We would certainly welcome hearing its views on facilitating the delivery by the NGO concerned of its own statement on International Women's Day.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Smyth of Ireland for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt, Mr. Sameh Aboul-Enein.

Mr. ABOUL-ENEIN (Egypt) (translated from Arabic): At the outset, I would like to say that we were looking forward to having the NGOs deliver a statement on the occasion of International Women's Day without any intermediary this year. Egypt, like many other members of the Conference, hopes that things will be different next year, following the practice in many other disarmament forums. This would be a mark of respect for the role of NGOs, for International Women's Day and for the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Secondly, on this the seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention, and having due regard to what has been achieved in the humanitarian and social domains, Egypt is still waiting for the Convention to take account of the concerns and interests of many developing countries, including Egypt. We have stated our position on this issue on numerous occasions, most recently at the Review Conference in Nairobi and meeting in Zagreb. We refer you to the detailed statements which Egypt delivered on those two occasions.

There are about 22 million mines and remnants of ordnance in Egypt, which are left over from the Second World War. Egypt calls on the States responsible for laying the mines to remove them and bear their responsibilities in this regard, especially in the light of the negative impact which the presence of such mines has on development in Egypt. The mines continue to claim more and more victims, giving rise to complex humanitarian and social problems.

(Mr. Aboul-Enein, Egypt)

Egypt calls on the international community, on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention, to accede to its requests and give due regard to the rights of affected countries in order to strike the balance called for in the Convention, to realize its humanitarian objectives, and to support current international endeavours to achieve the universality of the Convention in a credible manner.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Egypt, Mr. Aboul-Enein, for his statement and suggestions. Now I give the floor to the representative of Colombia, Mr. Rafael Quintero Cubides.

Mr. QUINTERO CUBIDES (Colombia) (translated from Spanish): I would like to revert very briefly to the question of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Landmines, but first I would like to say that we fully agree with and support what was said by the distinguished representative of Ireland.

Colombia, which has the sad honour of being the country most seriously affected by the scourge of anti-personnel mines, in the western hemisphere and the fourth worldwide, recognizes the major importance of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Landmines. Colombia congratulates all the countries for which the Convention has served to protect their citizens from the inhuman consequences of their use. During the past seven years we have suffered an average of two persons injured or killed each day; 70 per cent of them were civilians, and of them 40 per cent of those were boys and girls. We can only express our envy of those who do not have to undergo such suffering. Until we achieve perfect and complete universalization of the Convention, and as long as anti-personnel mines are still being produced in the world and are still reaching non-State actors with the present surprising ease, we fear we will continue to feel the same: envy and suffering.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Colombia, Mr. Quintero Cubides. The next speaker will be the representative of France, Mr. Jean-Michel Despax.

Mr. DESPAX (France) (translated from French): My delegation was not planning to speak this morning. However, a number of direct and indirect questions have been addressed to the French delegation, and I think it is important to clarify some of these points. First of all, I would like to say that I am gratified by the interest of the delegations here, and in particular the delegation of Syria, in the statements made by my Ambassador in this forum. I am also gratified that I can speak in greater depth on the question of a treaty designed to halt the production of fissile material, immediately after the general debate on nuclear disarmament. This is indeed the idea that we had of the structured, targeted and interactive debate as proposed by the Ambassador of Poland on behalf of the six Presidents of the 2006 session of our Conference. I also note that throughout this room, and among all the regional groups which make up the Conference, a number of delegations have already taken up this issue, albeit in a preliminary manner. It is a good sign.

For our delegation, the conclusion of such a treaty is the next step in terms of multilateral nuclear disarmament assigned to the Conference on Disarmament. All the words I have used are

(Mr. Despax, France)

important. Why? One can have different views of whether a particular topic is ripe for treatment, and hence of the desirability of negotiation. One can also, I admit, have different views of the priorities of various groups. For our part, we have listened with great attention to the views expressed here on nuclear disarmament in general. However, a mandate and an objective have been given to us by the international community as of 1995, in the decision on principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament adopted by the NPT Review and Extension Conference, and were taken up in the final document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, as well as being at the heart of the substantive debates at the NPT Review Conference in 2005, even if, unfortunately, we did not have a substantive document agreed by consensus in 2005.

I think it might not be without interest to point out here that resolutions on the issue are regularly put to the vote in the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. France, like other countries, which are in fact very numerous here, voted in 2004 for the resolution proposed by the delegation of Canada, which specifically addressed this issue, and in 2005 in favour of the resolution proposed by the delegation of Japan, which more generally addressed nuclear arms, but which was the only resolution, in the circumstances, which dealt with the question of a treaty designed to halt the production of fissile material. The conclusion of such a treaty is therefore an objective which has been assigned to us; we have a mandate to initiate negotiations for this purpose. And here I come perhaps to the necessary clarification of the comments made here by my Ambassador last week, and the distinction we have to make between the conditions or lack of conditions which we see for the initiation of these negotiations here. In this regard, France, like the 24 other member countries of the European Union, is bound by a common position, which we adopted among ourselves on the eve of the NPT Review Conference in 2005, and which notes that we are in favour of a start to such negotiations, without preconditions, here, in the Conference on Disarmament. This position is legally binding for the members of the European Union, and of course we always uphold the application of this common position here in the Conference on Disarmament. This is what my Ambassador said initially.

However, every delegation here, European or non-European, will develop national positions during the negotiations. Therefore we thought it would be interesting to give indications on three elements which will be important for France when the negotiations get started. First there is the concept of the ban on future production of fissile material for explosive military purposes, then the question of existing stockpiles (I think France's position on this issue was not a great surprise to anyone here in the Conference, since it is a traditional and long-standing position of my delegation). On the other hand, the third element was not perhaps understood in all its subtlety, owing to the French translation of the term "verifiability", which for us in French refers to a notion which can be verified. We will be able to talk about it during the negotiations, and we are ready to explore this concept of verifiability. I just wanted to make that clarification.

An important matter for us: it seems to us nevertheless that, beyond those countries directly concerned by the question of the production of fissile material for explosive purposes - the figure 10 was mentioned, but I would like to have more specific information on that

(Mr. Despax, France)

evaluation - there is an agreement in the international community to begin negotiations on the production of fissile material which are non-discriminatory and universal in scope. This position has also been reiterated in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly.

I would not like to conclude without referring to the departure of our colleague, the Ambassador of New Zealand, Ambassador Tim Caughley. Certainly, it is always sad to see a colleague leave. In this case our sadness is somewhat lessened because we look forward, at least my delegation looks forward, to the prospect of seeing him return very soon in other duties, and to being able in that regard to benefit from his great qualities of integrity, rigorousness and professionalism. So, I wish him goodbye and we will see him very soon.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Despax of France for his statement. I now give the floor to Mr. Owade of Kenya.

Mr. OWADE (Kenya): Mr. President, since this is the first time we are taking the floor under your presidency, we want to take this opportunity to congratulate you most heartily and to thank you for the initiatives that you have undertaken to revitalize the work of the CD. You have our full support.

We did not plan to speak today, but we have taken the floor to make a brief comment on the statement that was to be delivered by the NGOs on International Women's Day. We truly regret that that statement could not be delivered directly by those who had drafted it. Our delegation did not speak when this matter was under discussion, but we want to make it clear that we were with the majority of delegations who supported the Irish proposal.

It is truly regrettable and we want to join those who have expressed disappointment at this situation, which in our view is deplorable. This august body will have to revisit its rules of procedure if it is to remain credible. And on this occasion, as we mark the anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention, of which my country had the privilege to host the Review Conference in 2004, we would want to implore the CD to borrow from the practice that has characterized the Mine Ban Convention, where Governments work hand in hand and very closely with the NGOs in addressing the challenges that have been addressed by the Convention. We are convinced that if the CD can adopt such an approach, we would be able to make great progress.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Kenya, Mr. Owade, for his statement and kind words addressed to me and his suggestions. I now have three speakers remaining on my list: the Syrian Arab Republic, Sweden and Algeria. I give the floor to Mr. Hussein Ali, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. ALI (Syrian Arab Republic) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, I apologize for asking for the floor again. I asked for the floor in order to respond to some of what was said by the representative of Israel. But before that I hope you will allow me to thank the Ambassador of New Zealand, Tim Caughley, for the efforts and wisdom which he placed in the service of the Conference. We are confident that we will continue to benefit from his efforts and wisdom in his new post.

(Mr. Ali, Syrian Arab Republic)

The representative of Israel said that his country's approach to disarmament was determined by regional tension. Here, I have to say that Israel is the one responsible for the regional tension in the Middle East, because it continues to occupy Arab territory in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. The Israeli delegation says that any disarmament process in the region must be based on a step-by-step approach and that the first step must be the establishment of peaceful relations between the countries of the region. We believe Israel knows that occupation cannot be reconciled with peace. Occupation is a constant state of aggression, it is a crime under international law. It cannot coexist with peace. Therefore, when Israel ends its occupation of the Occupied Territories and complies with international resolutions, there will be no problem establishing peaceful relations.

The Israeli representative said that his country had joined the consensus on the General Assembly resolution on ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons. If so, why does his country continue to refuse to adhere to the NPT, if it really wants to rid the region of nuclear weapons? Why does it not allow the International Atomic Energy Agency to inspect Israeli nuclear facilities, which, as recognized by Israeli experts and journalists, not only pose a security threat but threaten the environment of the region as a whole?

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Ali of the Syrian Arab Republic. The next speaker on my list is the representative of Sweden, Mr. Magnus Hellgren.

Mr. HELLGREN (Sweden): I would like to make a brief comment on the issue that has been discussed in the NGO statement, but before addressing the procedural aspects of that, I should like to take this opportunity to address our appreciation to the authors of that statement for a most useful and thought-provoking contribution to our work here, and I hope some of the authors will note that in the galleries where they are, I assume.

As the representative of a delegation who in this plenary, on the record, supported the very clear and wise proposal delivered by Ireland, we would like at this point to add voice to those who feel very strong dismay over the fact that this proposal was not accepted and put into practice. The practice we have again witnessed today with the voice of women on the occasion of International Women's Day being heard through an intermediary - a very distinguished intermediary, I must say - is again a reflection on the procedural problems of this body, but also of its non-transparent decision-making procedures, and in our view, the dysfunctional system of consultations through so-called regional groups.

We welcome your initiative, Sir, when it comes to considering ways of solving this issue, and we hope that this is the last year that this practice will be repeated.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Hellgren of Sweden. The next speaker is Mr. Khelif of Algeria.

Mr. KHELIF (Algeria) (translated from Arabic): Mr. President, what nuclear and non-nuclear States agree on is the importance of nuclear disarmament. The statements by the Russian and United States delegations on the efforts that their countries are making

(Mr. Khelif, Algeria)

to reduce nuclear arsenals are evidence that this is true. We thank them for their efforts, although, from my country's point of view, the question of irreversibility still needs to be addressed.

We listened closely to the statements made on a wide range of topics, including the FMCT and the priority which the Conference gives it. Going back to what the Ambassador of Germany said about the need to respect limitations on levels of armaments and thereby serve the legitimate security interests of States, I do not wish to detract from the importance of the FMCT, which is an important step in disarmament, especially if one considers the question of stockpiles. However, there are subjects that are important to a number of countries, namely, negative security assurances, external security and the danger of using these weapons for military purposes. It is not for us to prioritize the different issues; they all have the same importance. The four main issues are nuclear disarmament, FMCT, negative security assurances and outer space.

The permanent representatives who have been here for many years will be aware of the circumstances that led to the proposal put forward by the five Ambassadors on balancing out these different issues. However, to say that the FMCT has achieved virtual consensus among all groups, in contrast to the situation of the other issues, seems to us to be a premature assertion.

The second point that I wish to raise is the importance of establishing a subcommittee on disarmament. With all due respect to the French delegation, I would like to say that nuclear disarmament has been on the agenda of the international community since 1946. It was the subject of the first General Assembly resolution which formed the basis of the understanding that gave rise to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It was the subject of the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice.

I would just like to say that the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences proposed the establishment of a subsidiary body to deal with an FMCT, while step 4 of the 13 steps calls for the establishment of a subsidiary body to address and consider the issue of nuclear disarmament.

I would conclude by saying that for my delegation, like many other delegations, the establishment of such a subsidiary body on disarmament is a priority that should be addressed without delay in parallel with the other topics that I mentioned.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Khelif of Algeria. The last speaker on my list is Mr. Eslamizad of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. ESLAMIZAD (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, before anything else, please let me congratulate you on the assumption of your arduous task, wish you success and assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

I asked for the floor in exercise of my delegation's right of reply in order to react to some references made to my country by the Israeli representative today.

(Mr. Eslamizad, Islamic Republic of Iran)

The Israeli policy of aggression, occupation and constantly threatening the whole Middle East region with its arsenal of nuclear weapons as well as other types of weapons of mass destruction is certainly the main reason for insecurity and instability in the region. I would also like to add that, given the fact that Israel continues to remain out of the NPT, BWC and CWC, we find it the least, if at all authorized, to talk about the rights and obligations or compliance of States already parties to all of them, including Iran.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Mr. Eslamizad of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement. I now give the floor to Ambassador Carlo Trezza of Italy.

Mr. TREZZA (Italy): Mr. President, I would like first of all to pay tribute to Ambassador Caughley and to his very inspiring statement, which I understand is his farewell statement, and this is an opportunity to pay tribute to the important role he has played in this Conference and look forward to the new task that I believe he will be assigned.

We also listened with interest to the statement by the NGOs on the occasion of International Women's Day, and we recognize the role that NGOs can play in the field of disarmament.

Also, Ambassador Markotić of Croatia made a comprehensive presentation of the results achieved by the Ottawa Convention. At a certain point I had the feeling that I was within the framework of the Ottawa Convention, since many speakers addressed that issue. But the issue of mines was also addressed by the United States delegation, and we listened with great interest to their confirmation of the position that the United States has on the question of mines. Let me say that we took good note of the statement that the United States proposal is a complement and not in conflict with the Ottawa Convention.

As we have stated in the past, Italy is ready to deal with conventional issues in the Conference on Disarmament, including the question of landmines, anti-personnel landmines, provided that this is compatible with our obligations under the Ottawa Convention and our national legislation, which derives from the Ottawa Convention.

We want to pay tribute to the statement made by South Africa. Indeed, South Africa is an example of the retroactivity of nuclear weapons, and I think that this has to be constantly kept in mind as an important term of reference. We also share the views that they have expressed on more transparency and on the centrality of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The delegate of Syria questioned whether an FMCT was ready or more mature for negotiation in the CD. Our opinion is that there is more of a consensus in favour of a real negotiation on an FMCT, and we believe that it is more feasible. Let me also add that the question of disciplining fissile material, and in particular fissile material which is dedicated to nuclear explosions, is more urgent than ever at this stage. So there is also the matter of urgency in our view, and from this point of view, we welcome the anticipation by Japan of their very interesting paper, which I think we will need to listen to and digest more carefully.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Trezza of Italy for his overall analysis of today's debate.

This concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this time? That does not seem to be the case.

Before concluding this meeting, I should like to share with you some thoughts and ideas on the issue of the enhancement of the engagement of civil society in the work of the Conference, in particular on the current practice of addresses from women participating in the International Women's Day seminar, presented to the Conference on Disarmament.

As you will recall, during the current session, a great number of delegations expressed the view that this year such an address should be delivered to the Conference by the representative of women participating in this seminar. However, my extensive consultations on this issue were inconclusive and, consequently, the address was once again read out by the President.

Nevertheless, on the basis of my consultations and in the light of the overwhelming support of member States to allow such a case, I believe that the Conference could explore this issue further. Against this backdrop and also with your concurrence, I intend to request the Friends of the Presidents, on behalf of the P6, to explore the best applicable practice for a more constructive engagement of civil society in the work of the Conference, taking into consideration all practices in the United Nations and other organizations concerning the engagement of civil society in their work. The Friends are recommended to report on their results at the end of this year's session.

Last but not least, on the question of the compilation of various proposals and ideas under agenda items 1 and 2, which I indicated at the last plenary meeting, I am still working on the process of the compilation of our discussions, and it will be made available to delegations at the next plenary meeting.

This concludes our plenary meeting. The next plenary meeting will be held on Tuesday, 14 March 2006, at 10 a.m. in this conference room.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.