

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND NINETIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Thursday, 14 February 2008, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Samir LABIDI (Tunisia)

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I declare open the 1090th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. Before giving the floor to the speakers on my list I would like to take this opportunity to bid farewell to two distinguished colleagues, the Ambassadors of Brazil and Austria. Ambassador Carlos da Rocha Paranhos's term as representative of Brazil in the Conference on Disarmament is now reaching its end. Since his arrival in Geneva in 2003, he has represented his country with distinction and worked effectively in the fields of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. For example, last year he served as coordinator for item 4 of the agenda. He also successfully discharged important responsibilities in other disarmament sectors. Ambassador da Rocha Paranhos, who has always displayed great competence, great human qualities and much wisdom, leaves us an example to follow in successfully completing our work. On behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I would like to convey to our dear colleague, our friend and his family best wishes for success and happiness in his new role as his country's Ambassador to Moscow. You may rest assured, Excellency and dear friend, that you will leave behind many friends in Geneva who will surely miss you.

His Excellency the Ambassador of Austria, Mr. Wolfgang Petritsch, is not with us today owing to professional obligations linked to his departure. Before being appointed Permanent Representative to Geneva, Ambassador Petritsch was High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1999 and 2002. He was then appointed to Geneva, where among other things he served as President of the first review conference for the Ottawa Convention, which succeeded in adopting an action plan for continued efforts to completely eliminate anti-personnel mines. In recognition of his work in Bosnia and Herzegovina and his contribution to the elimination of anti-personnel mines, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament decided to award him the European Human Rights Prize for 2006. I request the delegation of Austria to be so kind as to communicate to Ambassador Petritsch our expressions of friendship and our best wishes for success in his future career. The representatives of the following countries are on the list of speakers for today's plenary meeting: Brazil, Algeria, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Syria and Bulgaria. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil.

Mr. da ROCHA PARANHOS (Brazil) (spoke in French): Mr. President, as I am not an Arabic speaker, I will speak in French to thank you most warmly for your kind words addressed to myself and my family. I hope that they reflect a friendship that has linked us ever more closely and a recognition of the work accomplished. I do not deserve them, but thank you very much.

(spoke in English)

I now turn to English.

Mr. President, I wish to start by warmly commending you on your excellent work as the first President of the Conference on Disarmament for the year 2008. Your tireless efforts to consult all delegations since last year with a view to obtaining consensus on the approval of our agenda and also on a programme of work deserve our full appreciation. I also wish to thank all the six Presidents of last year's session and to congratulate through you, Mr. President, the incoming Presidents of 2008, as well as the appointed coordinators for the discussions on the items of our agenda.

(Mr. da Rocha Paranhos, Brazil)

This is my last plenary meeting at the Conference and I would like to make some personal remarks as I bid farewell to you all. After four and a half years in charge of disarmament issues, I leave the Conference with mixed emotions. I have had the opportunity to engage in substantive work and discussions with very bright, intellectually gifted diplomats who devote their professional skills to one of the hardest and yet most important tasks in international relations. Nonetheless, despite the creativity, professionalism and disposition of all to engage in negotiations in this august chamber, we still have not managed to find the necessary consensus to bring the Conference on Disarmament back to effective negotiations in the disarmament field, after so many years of inaction.

The Brazilian delegation to the CD has always observed a pattern of flexibility with regard to different proposals that were introduced in this forum with a view to breaking the stalemate in which we find ourselves.

Back in the year 2000, our present Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Celso Amorim, presented a proposal known as the “Amorim proposal” as a contribution of the Brazilian presidency of the CD to finding consensus on a programme of work.

During my assignment in Geneva, we have also clearly indicated our support for the A-5 proposal, for the “Food for thought” paper presented by the former Dutch Ambassador, and we were very encouraged by the creative path conceived by our distinguished Polish colleague, Ambassador Rapacki, in 2006 which led to effective coordinated action by the six Presidents in conducting the work of our Conference.

This permanent demonstration of flexibility stems from the high level of political priority that Brazil attaches to the issue of disarmament as a key component of its foreign policy and to the Conference on Disarmament as the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

Last year we were encouraged by the substantive work held in this chamber. In my capacity of coordinator for item 4 - “Effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons” - I had for a moment regained hope that the serious engagement in very substantive discussions on that item as well as with regard to other core items on our agenda might lead us to cross the final bridge to adopt a programme of work on the basis of document L.1 and the complementary Presidential statements.

Once again in this farewell statement, I would like to stress Brazil’s flexibility and willingness to start negotiations.

We want to achieve a universal, non-discriminatory and effectively internationally verifiable fissile material treaty, but we have accepted to start negotiations “without preconditions” in order to arrive at such an objective. The fissile material treaty is the necessary complement to the complete test-ban treaty negotiated in the 1990s and would constitute, with verification provisions, an important step both in terms of disarmament and non-proliferation.

(Mr. da Rocha Paranhos, Brazil)

We are also prepared to engage in negotiations on a treaty to prevent the arms race in outer space. In this connection, we welcome the proposal presented by His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on a draft “Treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects”, which will be seriously considered by my authorities. It is of the utmost importance that this negotiating forum takes the lead in ensuring that outer space remains a peaceful domain in which scientific and technological research will enhance the perspectives of well-being and communication among peoples.

Brazil also attaches great importance to the issue of negative security assurances. We consider that the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones constitutes an important step, but should lead to the negotiation of a universal legally binding instrument to assure all countries that have forsworn the military nuclear option against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

The fact that we could agree on several proposals that were tabled in an effort to lead the CD out of its long-standing stalemate only reinforces Brazil’s willingness towards consensus-building and our firm commitment to the cause of disarmament. It does not mean that we favour the treatment of certain issues on the agenda to the detriment of others. Not all the proposals fitted into our expectations, but we were able to go along with them in good faith, in the spirit of strengthening multilateralism and finding concerted solutions for our common goals.

In my delegation’s view, flexibility and disposition to effectively start negotiations are all the more necessary in the present international security environment. We have a collective responsibility to avoid the CD becoming irrelevant in the light of the present challenges. The perceived challenges may vary amongst us, but it is our duty to try to negotiate in good faith to pursue the path to disarmament.

As a country that has voluntarily relinquished the military nuclear option, Brazil is deeply concerned with attempts to reinterpret the commitments adhered to by the nuclear-weapon States in article VI of the NPT, as if disarmament should now be subject to new conditions invoked by those very nuclear-weapon States without a basis in the letter and spirit of the NPT. The final document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference states that “the Conference agrees on the following practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons”. Commitments and decisions freely adopted in an international conference and enshrined in its final documents by consensus constitute, in Brazil’s perspective, clear-cut and legitimate undertakings and must be implemented by the countries that assumed them in good faith.

It is seriously disturbing that military doctrines now envisage the continued use of small, very sophisticated nuclear weapons not any longer as a deterrent against nuclear-weapon States as in the past, but as a possible weapon to be used against new challenges.

Much has been said in this very chamber about the need for the CD to tackle new issues or to engage in the agenda of the twenty-first century. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his statement at the opening of the 2008 session recalled that “disarmament and non-proliferation are closely associated with the very mission of the United Nations. They are widely recognized as

(Mr. da Rocha Paranhos, Brazil)

indispensable to achieving the maintenance of international peace and security, a core principle in the United Nations Charter”. And the Secretary-General continued by observing that: “We need progress because concerted disarmament will forestall arms races. And forestalling arms races calms tensions. By reducing tensions, we free up resources that would have been diverted to armaments. These resources can ... be used to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.”

Developing non-nuclear-weapon States cannot but subscribe entirely to the Secretary-General’s remarks, especially when we are confronted with the staggering amounts still allocated to armament, against the background of a world which still has to cope with more than 900 million people facing hunger and malnutrition.

For this reason, Brazil considers that disarmament is more than ever an issue of the twenty-first-century agenda. And the CD is the “locus” for the international community to pursue it vigorously.

I could not end before expressing my heartfelt gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, and to the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Tim Caughley, for their permanent support, wisdom and solidarity. I also wish to extend my thanks to the entire secretariat staff for their professionalism and teamwork and to our interpreters, who always perform with great efficiency the difficult task to make it possible for us to better understand each other. To the NGOs that follow our deliberations, sometimes with impatience and disappointment, but always persevering. And last, but not least, to you all, my colleagues, for your friendship and cooperation.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): Once again, I thank you for your kind words and your friendship. On behalf of all of us I once again wish you good luck in your new post. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Nigeria.

Mr. UHOMOIBHI (Nigeria): Mr. President, let me, first of all, congratulate you on your presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and also assure you and your fellow P-6 colleagues of my delegation’s full support and cooperation in the delicate tasks ahead of you this year.

I should also like to seize the opportunity to applaud the excellent work done by your predecessors, all of whom worked tirelessly in 2007 to increase the level and intensity of our engagements in this forum.

My delegation associates itself with the position of the G-21, as expressed in the statement delivered at the plenary of 29 January 2008 by the distinguished Ambassador of Sri Lanka. I am, however, taking the floor at this time to highlight my country’s position on some fuzzy areas of our work.

Every year, for the past 10 years, and that is a long time to say, deliberations in this chamber have always started with high hopes at the beginning of every new session, only to end in despair at year’s end. Last year, my Foreign Minister, Professor Joy Ogwu, addressed the CD

(Mr. Uhomoibhi, Nigeria)

in the same vein. This year has not been any different, but we can break this cycle of hope, this cycle of missed opportunities and this cycle of despair because we already have a road map to concentrate our efforts. For once, we can make real progress because, under the guidance of the 2007 P-6 proposal, we were able to engage in frank and robust conversations, among ourselves, on all items on the CD agenda.

The outcome of our consultations and discussions was well captured in the proposal by the six Presidents, as incorporated in document CD/2007/L.1, and complemented by CD/2007/CRP.5 and CD/2007/CRP.6. For my delegation, the P-6 proposal is an invitation to the CD to move from talk to action. Indeed, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his address to this forum on 23 January 2008, very rightly called the P-6 proposal “balanced and carefully crafted”. We agree with the Secretary-General’s considered view, and we call on those yet to embrace it to do so.

My delegation is, of course, mindful that some delegations are not happy with the proposal. So are we but, as we have stressed on previous occasions, we believe it provides a realistic basis to get the CD back to work.

For us, addressing the fears of some does not, and should not, require of us to start from ground zero in 2008, because a basis for the intensification of the debate already exists in the P-6 proposal. The challenge for us this year is to take the few but courageous steps necessary to move us to the destination we all desire and aspire to, and which the people who sent us here very well deserve.

This is entirely possible and plausible because, in the first few weeks of this year, the CD has already heard important statements and proposals from the Government of the United Kingdom, the Governments of the United States of America, Russia and China, leading nuclear-weapon States and, coincidentally, permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

From these briefings, there are at least two clear messages for the CD. First, there is the encouraging sign that the nuclear-weapon States are prepared to take their responsibility for promoting international peace and security much more seriously. Second, these briefings demonstrate the trust and confidence the international community has in the CD as a competent forum for multilateral disarmament negotiations.

If the CD needed any encouragement for it to get its act together and to begin the serious business of negotiating arms control and disarmament treaties, these timely interventions should provide enough food for thought.

Finally, having just listened to the farewell statement read by the Brazilian Ambassador, I want to associate myself with the statement made by the President of the CD - to wish him the very best of luck and the very best of success in his future endeavours.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Nigeria for his statement and his kind words and assure him of my wholehearted friendship. I have on my list the coordinator of the Group of 21, who wishes to take the floor, with your permission, as well as the Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Malaysia.

Ms. HSU (Malaysia): Mr. President, we are making a general statement on item 3.

Malaysia shares the view of the many that the peaceful use of outer space is in the common interest of humanity. We have thus consistently co-sponsored the United Nations General Assembly resolution on prevention of an arms race in outer space. And its adoption annually by an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly reflects the importance and urgency that the international community attaches to this issue.

The economic and technological development of countries is increasingly dependent on space technology. Space security is thus essential to ensure that the benefits derived from the peaceful uses of space will be enjoyed by all countries and peoples of the world. The weaponization of space, on the other hand, poses a serious threat to the well-being of humanity. It would transform an arena being used for the common benefit to one of confrontation, and in the process undermine the already fragile foundations of existing arms control agreements, particularly that of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Whilst some have argued that there is currently no arms race in outer space, the likelihood of such a development cannot be denied. We should not have to wait for space's weaponization or the start of an arms race before we begin discussions or negotiations on a legally binding international instrument. By then it would be too late. And the dynamics would be more difficult to manage.

We note that the prevention of an arms race in outer space has been a long-standing agenda item of the CD. In the last couple of years, the CD has focused and structured discussions on this issue. And as a delegation, Malaysia has benefited much from these discussions. Nonetheless, the CD has to move forward. Here we wish to recall that the General Assembly has reiterated time and again that the CD, as the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, has the primary role in the negotiation of a multilateral agreement or agreements, as appropriate, on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects.

It is in this context that Malaysia welcomes the introduction of a draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects (PPWT) by the Russian Foreign Minister on behalf of the Russian Federation and China on 12 February. The draft treaty presents this Conference with an opportunity to address the concerns of any possibility of weaponization in outer space, as well as the safety of civil and commercial space objects. While we share the view that existing legal instruments regarding outer space, such as the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, have an important role in promoting the peaceful use of outer space and regulating outer space activities,

(Ms. Hsu, Malaysia)

these respective instruments are unfortunately inadequate. None addresses the advancements and developments in weapons technology which are not WMD, the possibility of weaponization in space, the transit of weapons or the usage of weapons in space which threatens civil and commercial space assets.

My delegation views the draft PPWT as a positive step in the process towards formulating a new international legal instrument in preventing the placement of weapons in outer space. We note that the draft is a further development of the working paper (CD/1679) on "Possible elements for a future international legal agreement on the prevention of the deployment of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects" presented by several countries, including China and Russia, in 2002. Obviously this draft has also taken on board some of the views and suggestions expressed since then.

The proposed PPWT would be an important step in strengthening the existing international legal system in preventing the weaponization of and an arms race in outer space while facilitating and enhancing its peaceful activities. We look forward to further discussion on the draft in the sessions ahead. We hope such enriched discussions would pave the way for further work in the CD on this issue. Given these developments, we hope that the CD would set an objective to approach the issue in a comprehensive manner, engaging in structured substantive discussions with a view to the early commencement of negotiations, for an international legally binding treaty to prevent placement of arms in outer space. This could be followed by the establishment of an ad hoc committee with the appropriate mandate agreeable to all. Achieving this objective would be a manifestation of this Conference's commitment towards non-proliferation and disarmament and as well to the protection and preservation of outer space.

Pending conclusion of a legally binding instrument, Malaysia continues to agree with the recommendation that there should be a moratorium on the testing of all kinds of weapons and on the deployment of weapons in outer space. We welcome the independent unilateral announcements by some States on such a moratorium. We also believe that spacefaring States should increase their level of transparency as a further confidence-building measure of their peaceful intentions in outer space activities. In this regard we welcome the joint statement on the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) between the Russian Federation and the United States of America at the sixty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly, on initiatives to eliminate their intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles as set forth in the INF Treaty.

My delegation believes that the CD can engage in meaningful discussion, dialogue and exchange of views on the peaceful uses of outer space and of future placement or use of weapons in space. We should seek to ensure that outer space will eternally be a common heritage of mankind and belong to the international community. The CD has included PAROS in its agenda for many years. Let this year be the year we further strengthen our resolve and address this vital issue to ensure that the best interests of mankind are served.

Before I conclude, Mr. President, I wish to associate myself with the statement you made concerning our great colleague, the Ambassador of Brazil.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Malaysia for her statement. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Bulgaria.

Mr. DRAGANOV (Bulgaria): As this is the first time I am taking the floor during this session, Sir, may I use the occasion to congratulate you on the exemplary way that you have been discharging your functions as President of our Conference on Disarmament and wish you every success, as well as the other distinguished members of the P-6 group?

I am taking the floor to make an announcement. On previous occasions, Bulgaria has expressed deep concern over the humanitarian consequences for the civilian population caused by the use of cluster munitions. In this respect, I am happy to inform you that yesterday, 13 February 2008, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted a decision imposing a moratorium on the use of cluster munitions currently held by the Bulgarian armed forces until the entry into force of an international treaty on the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

Bulgaria is hopeful that other countries will follow in the same path and translate into practice their concern regarding the severe humanitarian impact caused by cluster munitions.

I would like to reiterate the Bulgarian position: that the time is ripe for the international community to start negotiations on an international, legally binding instrument on the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians.

And finally, may I also join your words of commendation and good wishes for our distinguished colleagues, Ambassador da Rocha Paranhos and Ambassador Petritsch, on leaving the Conference and moving on to other important tasks? On a personal note, may I add that I am sadly losing two good friends and neighbours, the one sitting next to me in the Conference on Disarmament and the other at our meetings in the European Union?

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the Ambassador of Bulgaria for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Switzerland.

Mr. STREULI (Switzerland) (spoke in French): I would first like to tell our colleague and friend Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos that I regret his departure enormously. We already miss him. My delegation would like to speak on agenda item 3 concerning the prevention of an arms race in space. The problem of the sustainable use of space is a subject which continues to grow in importance. This can be easily explained. Space systems have become a critical infrastructure which is essential for the prosperity and security of many countries. We have only to mention the role of these systems in the areas of communications, navigation or the collection of information on the environment to illustrate this truth. Guaranteeing the security of this critical infrastructure should therefore be a common objective to which the Conference on Disarmament must commit itself. In the light of certain worrying developments which might in the long run call into question the principle of the use of space for peaceful purposes, as enshrined in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, this assembly has an important role to play.

(Mr. Streuli, Switzerland)

Accordingly, Switzerland wishes to express its wholehearted gratitude to Russia for its efforts to promote dialogue on the questions of preventing an arms race in space within the Conference, and is particularly grateful to Russia for having submitted here, together with China, on 12 February, through its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lavrov, a draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against space objects. Switzerland supports the general objectives set out in this document and believes that this draft treaty corresponds to an interesting phase of work. However, it is clear that many technical or legal points need more thorough study, and that significant political obstacles need to be overcome if we want to be in a position to secure agreement on this subject. Switzerland therefore supports the consideration of this draft treaty by the Conference and will play a full part in the discussions on it, beginning with the informal meetings on 21 February next. My delegation also wishes to draw attention to the fact that the drawing up of a treaty designed to prevent the placement of weapons in space is only one of the avenues we need to explore further in order to consolidate the security of space infrastructure. The development of transparency and confidence-building measures relating to space activities is an equally important dimension and deserves our full attention. At its last session, the United Nations General Assembly emphasized the importance of this approach in the framework of a resolution, resolution 62/20, which Switzerland fully supported. My country is therefore convinced of the need to discuss such measures further in the framework of the Conference. In our view, these discussions should cover a broad spectrum and include initiatives such as those relating to the formulation of a code of conduct for space activities.

Finally, as has already been emphasized by other delegations, civilian and military activities in space are ever more closely intertwined. This thus requires closer cooperation between the Conference and the United Nations bodies responsible for space issues, beginning with the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Mr. President, you have come to the end of your term of office and I would like to commend you on the way in which you have guided our discussions.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Switzerland for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. VASILIEV (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): I plan to make a statement of a general nature. And in that connection I could perhaps speak after the distinguished representative of Sri Lanka, because I understand his statement will also be of a general nature - but I am in your hands.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation. We have now come to the end of the last plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament during Tunisia's term of office. For some months the Tunisian delegation has been working tirelessly for the cause of the Conference on Disarmament and the advancement of its work. From the first day, our country has been well aware of the scale of this responsibility and its very particular scope. Drawing on its profound convictions inspired by openness, dialogue and moderation, as well as the relations of friendship and cooperation it maintains with

(The President)

the member countries of our body, Tunisia has acted with resolve and determination to ensure that its term of office was a useful tool in the service of the aspirations of this body. Once again I remind you of the importance we have attached to the fully transparent consultations with delegations which we entered into from October onwards in New York and continued until the last hour of our term. In this way we have noted a constructive spirit on the part of all parties, which would benefit from further strengthening. This positive atmosphere made it possible in particular to adopt the agenda rapidly, to draw up a timetable of activities and to appoint the coordinators for the agenda items. With the positive involvement of all the regions, the Conference then got down to work immediately with an extensive programme including visits by experts from various institutions. This is the challenge which all delegations are successfully taking up, as public opinion has long been expecting strong signs from the Conference on Disarmament. Such a challenge is not impossible because in a few weeks, our assembly created a major event by receiving as soon as its proceedings opened various distinguished personalities who delivered important messages to the Conference, and I would like to mention chronologically and with great pleasure Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Abdelwahab Abdallah, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia, Mr. Des Browne, the Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom, Mr. Thomas D'Agostino, the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration of the United States of America, and Mr. Sergey Lavrov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. I would also mention the message from Mr. Yang Jiechi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, which was read to us by the Chinese Ambassador. This list of distinguished personalities is a clear demonstration of the scale of the responsibility borne by the CD and reminds us of the scope of our countries' expectations. This objectively favourable context requires a yet more determined effort on the part of all of us if we wish to secure tangible results. Let us maintain this momentum within the Conference. These are the virtues of multilateralism which we need to bear in mind in every action in order to make it possible for the Conference to move forward, avoiding all politicization of this august assembly, which remains the only negotiating body in the field of disarmament.

There remains one pleasant duty which I will perform with particular pleasure, and that is to thank all of you very much. I have found amongst you a spirit of friendship, all the encouragement and support I could have wished for as well as an active collegiality, which enable us to say that we have done our best, within the resources of our delegation, in performing our task as President. It is also an opportunity for me to express my thanks to the six colleagues who chaired the Conference in 2007, particularly the Ambassador of Syria, my predecessor, and also to convey my best wishes for success to my colleagues and friends, the other five Presidents for 2008, the Ambassador of Turkey, the Ambassador of Ukraine, the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, the Ambassador of the United States of America and, lastly, the Ambassador of Venezuela, as well as the coordinators for the different agenda items. I wish to assure all these colleagues that my delegation is fully prepared to continue to work in complete cooperation with the other five Presidents throughout 2008. I am convinced that they will find in all delegations the willingness and spirit of cooperation which they vouchsafed to the Tunisian delegation. I convey my sincere wishes for success as well as my support and encouragement to

(The President)

my colleague and friend, the Ambassador of Turkey, Mr. Üzümcü, to whom the honour of presiding over the Conference on Disarmament falls. I would also like to express many thanks to the secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament for their assistance and willingness to help. I pay tribute to their expertise and their efficiency under the leadership of the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Ordzhonikidze, and his deputy, Mr. Tim Caughley. My warm thanks also go to the interpreters, who have assisted us in our work with praiseworthy skill and great finesse. Thank you for your attention. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Sri Lanka.

Mr. JAYATILLEKA (Sri Lanka): Mr. President, I shall speak initially on behalf of the G-21 and then just a word as Sri Lanka, but I shall indicate that as I go along.

At our G-21 meeting yesterday, we expressed our unanimous pride at having you, a member of our Group, preside over the Conference during this period. You and your team have demonstrated dynamism and decisiveness. It has been an activist presidency, which has got us off to an excellent start. While being decisive, you have also been fair, inclusive and balanced, criss-crossing the CD in a flurry of consultations. We have all been kept informed. We have all been consulted. You have represented the spirit of the G-21 without demonstrating any bias in favour of any bloc, including the G-21. You have been friendly, fraternal and yet firm when you have had to be so. So for all this, the G-21 thanks you and your able team for this period of your leadership. I thank you, Mr. President.

And now, just a word as Sri Lanka to thank and say farewell to our Brazilian colleague, Ambassador Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos. I have had only a brief period of working with His Excellency, but we have met and talked on numerous occasions. We use the term “distinguished” very frequently in our daily discourse, but I think that is an adjective that perfectly fits our colleague, the Brazilian Ambassador, who will be leaving our company soon. I am sorry to see him go. I shall miss him, and I shall always remember his combination of knowledgeability, elegance, sincerity and flexibility. Thank you and goodbye.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the Ambassador of Sri Lanka for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair on behalf of the Group of 21. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Syria, Mr. Hamoui.

(spoke in Arabic)

You have the floor, Sir.

Mr. HAMOUI (Syrian Arab Republic) (spoke in Arabic): Mr. President. I am pleased to be able to join the Ambassador of Sri Lanka in expressing our gratitude to you for your successful presidency; the first presidency usually calls for enormous amounts of effort and work. You accomplished your tasks effectively with the support of your delegation. I would not be exaggerating if I said that, through the intensive contacts that we had in New York and here in Geneva, you managed to create a sense of hope and optimism in me and in the minds of many members of the Conference.

(Mr. Hamoui, Syrian Arab Republic)

During your presidency, we heard important statements, beginning with that of the United Nations Secretary-General, followed by the statement by the distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, the British Secretary of State, the Coordinator of the United States National Security Agency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the intervention by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

In that context allow me, on behalf of my entire delegation, to express my thanks to the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation and China for the initiative on the peaceful use of outer space. We hope that we will be able to begin the substantive work right away on the basis of that initiative, so that it may be adopted as a binding international legal instrument.

Allow me, Mr. President, to thank the coordinators for their laudable efforts, which were launched thanks to your efforts. We wish them every success in their endeavours and urge them to have patience and perseverance.

I also wish the incoming Turkish President all the best and every success. My delegation will spare no effort to cooperate with him and with all the 2008 Presidents.

Lastly, we regret that we have to bid farewell to the Ambassadors of Brazil and Austria. We wish them personal happiness and professional success. We will always remember you, our friend, Ambassador Carlos, for your efforts at the Conference. We will always remember your smile and your wisdom. We also wish success to the Ambassador of Austria. I would also like to welcome the statement by the Bulgarian Government regarding the freeze on the use of cluster weapons. I hope that many countries will follow suit.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): I would like to thank you for that statement and for the kind words that you addressed to me.

(spoke in French)

I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation.

Mr. VASILIEV (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): Mr. President, today is the last plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament to be held during your term of office. My delegation has worked hand in hand with you as the coordinator of the Eastern European group. And like you, we are handing the reins to our good neighbours, Romania.

You have had a difficult task in the first stage of the work of the 2008 session of the Conference on Disarmament. The large volume of consultations with delegations, with your P-6 colleagues, with this year's Presidents, also enabled you to secure the speedy adoption of the Conference's agenda. Together with continued efforts to reach a consensus on the programme of work of the Conference, informal thematic discussions are under way on all the items on the agenda we have adopted. You have presented coordinators for such discussions and a schedule for the first part of this year's session. We believe that all the work which has been done by you

(Mr. Vasiliev, Russian Federation)

and under your presidency provides a good basis for the further work of the Conference under the presidency of Turkey with a view to seeking a compromise on the programme of work of our forum, and we wish you every success in this.

I would particularly like to highlight the participation in the work of the Conference by high-level leaders during your term of office, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, at the opening of this session, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia and the Russian Federation, the Minister of Defence of Great Britain, the head of the United States Nuclear Security Administration, and also the address to the Conference by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of China. We view all this as constituting meaningful political signals of support for our forum and its important role in disarmament, non-proliferation and the strengthening of international security.

In conclusion, allow me to endorse the words which have been addressed to Ambassador Paranhos, who has been appointed Ambassador to Moscow. I don't think I am revealing a secret if I mention that some of our other colleagues are also to be sent off shortly to Moscow as their countries' Ambassadors. In this way the Conference on Disarmament and our forum are becoming a sort of blacksmith's workshop for Moscow, and we of course can only welcome that. We hope that their work will be as brilliant as that for which they have distinguished themselves here in Geneva, and as brilliant as the weather that we are enjoying today outside.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of China.

Mr. WANG (China) (spoke in Chinese): Over the past month, under your able guidance, the Conference on Disarmament has made substantial progress. Not only has it smoothly adopted its agenda, it has also benefited from high-level participation. Strong impetus has been given to the work of the Conference, and a solid foundation has been laid for our work this year, to ensure its successful outcome. Beijing would like to convey its gratitude to you, Mr. President.

The Chinese delegation would like to join other speakers in thanking the distinguished Ambassador of Brazil for his work. Brazil has made tremendous efforts to carry forward the work of the Conference on Disarmament, most notably through the so-called Amorim proposal. It is also my hope that the Conference will apply its best efforts to accomplishing its tasks.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of China for his statement and his kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco.

Mr. LOULICHKI (Morocco) (spoke in French): My delegation has already had an opportunity, as you know, to set out its position on the major issues submitted for consideration by the Conference on Disarmament. My delegation endorses the statement made by the

(Mr. Loulichki, Morocco)

Ambassador of Sri Lanka on behalf of the Group of 21. It wishes to congratulate you, Mr. President, in your capacity as the first President of the Conference on Disarmament for 2008, on the way in which you have conducted the business of the Conference, your availability, your readiness to listen, your goodwill and your constant smile. In all the delegations, you have succeeded in creating a favourable atmosphere which enabled pragmatic and constructive progress to be made in the work of the Conference. The participation in the Conference by senior figures bears witness to resumed interest by the international community in disarmament issues. This can be laid at your door and that of the other five Presidents of the Conference. It is true that the Conference was able to base its work on the efforts undertaken by the Presidents of the Conference for 2007. This satisfaction should not lead us to forget the need for the Conference on Disarmament to acquire new momentum and genuinely live up to its vocation as the single multilateral forum to arrive at the sought-after general disarmament. One of the frustrations of diplomacy, especially multilateral diplomacy, is to witness the departure of valued colleagues and friends with whom we have worked, sometimes intensively, and whose human and professional qualities we have been able to appreciate; certainly this is the case of the Ambassador of Brazil, Mr. Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos, and the Ambassador of Austria, Wolfgang Petritsch, to whom I would like to wish continued success in their outstanding diplomatic careers.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Morocco for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. Thank you once again, dear Ambassador and friend. I now give the floor to the Ambassador of Italy.

Ms. FIORI (Italy): Mr. President, as Coordinator of the Western Group, I would like to thank you, dear Ambassador Labidi, for the excellent work done. I think your smooth and smart conduct of the work of the Conference has helped us a lot in reaching good results up to now.

I would also like to thank you for your willingness and your tireless efforts. You were always available to every one of us, and I think that this human aspect of your character is very important, and I would like to thank you particularly for this.

At the same time, I would like to welcome the new presidency, Turkey, and take this opportunity to express our best wishes to Ambassador da Rocha Paranhos and to Ambassador Petritsch in their new assignments.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Italy for her statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I also thank all the members of the Western Group. I now give the floor to the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan.

Mr. KHAN (Pakistan): Mr. President, we associate ourselves with the statement made by Ambassador Jayatilleka on behalf of the Group of 21.

I am taking the floor to compliment you on your effective leadership of the Conference and thank your able delegation for their hard work. Briefly, your presidency can be described in four words: focus, drive, inclusiveness and elegance. We are confident that your successor, Ambassador Üzümcü of Turkey, will build on what you have achieved.

(Mr. Khan, Pakistan)

I join you and the Conference in recognizing the substantial contribution made by Ambassador Carlos da Rocha Paranhos, and wish him well in his next assignment in Moscow. I would also like to mention the invaluable work done by Ambassador Petritsch in different United Nations settings. We wish him success.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in French): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Pakistan for his statement and his kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the distinguished representative of Algeria.

Mr. KHELIF (Algeria) (spoke in Arabic): The Ambassador of Algeria should have been present at this meeting, but for reasons beyond his control he had to leave Geneva and therefore was not able to attend.

Mr. President, all previous speakers have eloquently expressed the importance of the work that you have undertaken since last year, in consultation with your predecessor, the Ambassador of Syria, and with the six Presidents for this year, culminating in a timetable and an agenda, which serve as a basis for our work, and the attendance of distinguished persons at the Conference. So, thank you again, Sir, and thanks to your delegation and to the six Presidents. The Algerian delegation stands ready to cooperate with them, as we have done with you, Mr. President. The Algerian delegation would also like to join others in expressing thanks and appreciation to the Ambassador of Brazil, and we wish him every success in Moscow. His departure from the Conference is certainly a loss for it, but we are convinced that his successor will contribute the same energy and dynamism to the Conference.

The Algerian delegation took note of the proposal put forward by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Ambassador of China on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of his country. This proposal has been forwarded to our capital for consideration. We hope that the discussions on the issue of outer space will be given sufficient time to examine the proposal and provide the necessary clarifications. We hope that it will help us to make progress in our work.

The PRESIDENT (spoke in Arabic): I thank the representative of Algeria for his statement and for the kind and fraternal words addressed to me.

(spoke in French)

Lastly, I would like to leave protocol aside for a few seconds and say to delegations that in the team of six Presidents good work is being accomplished in exemplary conditions of friendship and candour. We will continue to work in that same spirit. The main part of our business lies ahead. I would therefore like once again to convey my best wishes to my friend the Ambassador of Turkey, who will preside over our work with his well-known wisdom and skills. Once again I thank the Secretary-General, the secretariat and the interpreters. This brings our work today to an end. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held under the presidency of the Ambassador of Turkey on Tuesday, 19 February 2008 at 10 a.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.