

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Saturday, 7 March 2009, at 10.40 a.m.

President: Mr. Chitsaka CHIPAZIWA (Zimbabwe)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1130th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Before introducing our distinguished guest for today, on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, I would like to extend a warm welcome to a new colleague, Ambassador Vu Dung, the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, who has assumed his responsibilities in Geneva.

Allow me now to extend a very warm welcome to our distinguished speaker today, Mr. Sergei Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. We know the importance that country attaches to disarmament, including the work of the Conference on Disarmament. I have the distinct honour and pleasure to invite Mr. Lavrov to take the floor.

Mr. LAVROV (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): It was slightly over a year ago that I last spoke in this forum. Since that time, much effort has been devoted to improving the international situation. However, no drastic positive change for the better has occurred. Moreover, we have witnessed a further increase in the potential for global conflict, which has distracted us from efforts to solve urgent problems related to the need to enhance international stability and to create an environment conducive to consistent steps on the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Today, we must acknowledge that it has not been possible to overcome the deadlock in the field of multilateral disarmament. The stalemate in the Conference's activities that has continued for over 10 years clearly reflects the unfavourable state of affairs as regards efforts to support international security. The efforts being made by groups of "like-minded" States may partially solve disarmament problems, but in the long term such efforts will face serious constraints and could in fact lead to the erosion of the existing mechanisms, including those of our Conference. Additional difficulties are undoubtedly caused by the global financial and economic crisis, which is restricting the supply of resources for disarmament and conversion programmes.

At the same time, it is obvious that in a context of globalization it is not possible to find a way out of the crisis through military preparations or by following the path of war, as happened in the 1930s. Regrettably, the "cold war" institutionalized the militarization of international relations, and we need to repudiate this trend as quickly as possible.

Russia is aware of its special responsibility as a nuclear Power and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in matters of nuclear disarmament and the strengthening of the regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Our country has fully met its obligations under the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Weapons. Implementation of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty is also proceeding successfully. It is now time to take new steps in this area which are aimed at making our world more secure.

(Mr. Lavrov, Russian Federation)

We welcome the statements made by the new United States Administration in favour of multilateral approaches to the maintenance of international security and disarmament. We are prepared to “press the reset button” in our relations, as suggested by our American partners, and yesterday we talked about this in detail with the United States Secretary of State, Mrs. Hillary Clinton. The outcome of our talks yesterday gives me grounds for hope, and I expect that the first personal meeting between Presidents Medvedev and Obama in London at the beginning of April will be productive. The conclusion of a new legally binding Russian-American treaty on strategic offensive arms could be a priority.

Let me read out the statement made by Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, on this issue.

“On 5 December this year, the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Weapons (START I) expires. The importance of this instrument in ensuring international peace and stability can hardly be overestimated. It played a historic role in ensuring strategic stability and security, as well as reducing arsenals of strategic offensive weapons. Its implementation has made the world safer.

“Today, we are facing a pressing need to move further along the road of nuclear disarmament. In accordance with its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Russia is fully committed to reaching the goal of a world free from these most deadly weapons.

“As far back as 2005, we invited the United States to conclude a new agreement to succeed START I. It could be based on all the best elements which have effectively functioned under the current Treaty, while reflecting present-day strategic realities.

“In arriving at that decision, we took into consideration, among other things, the fact that the limits established by START I were met as far back as 2001. At present, the numbers of strategic delivery vehicles and their warheads are considerably lower. Thus, START I currently not only does not place restrictions on Russia and the United States in the missile and nuclear sphere, but in fact allows them to build up arsenals of strategic offensive arms.

“Our approach to the new agreement is based on the following considerations. The future agreement should be legally binding. It is of no less importance that the instrument should be forward-looking and should limit not only warheads but also strategic delivery vehicles, i.e. intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers.

“We also deem it necessary to exclude the possibility of deploying strategic offensive arms outside national territories.

(Mr. Lavrov, Russian Federation)

“I wish to emphasize that Russia is open to dialogue and is ready for negotiations with the new American Administration. I fully share the commitment of United States President Barack Obama to the noble goal of saving the world from the nuclear threat, and I see here fertile ground for joint efforts.

“I believe that constructive cooperation in this field will contribute to the general improvement of Russian-American relations.

“Dmitry Medvedev”

More and more international initiatives have been put forward in the field of nuclear disarmament, such as the Hoover Initiative, the Global Zero Initiative, the Evans-Kawaguchi Commission, the Luxembourg Forum and the recent plan put forward by Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Great Britain. Russia supports the focus of these initiatives on solving global security issues on a multilateral basis, and is willing to make a positive contribution to their consideration.

However, progress towards “global zero” can be achieved only through enhanced strategic stability and strict adherence to the principle of equal security for all. In turn this presupposes the need to carry out a set of measures required for a sustainable and consistent disarmament process. Among these measures are, in our view:

- Continuation of the process of nuclear disarmament by all nuclear-weapon States, while they smoothly engage with the efforts already being undertaken by Russia and the United States in this area
- Prevention of the deployment of weapons in outer space
- Ban on the deployment of strategic offensive weapons equipped with conventional warheads, i.e. the creation of a so-called “compensatory” potential
- Provision of assurances that States do not possess a “nuclear upload potential”
- Ban on attempts to use NPT membership in order to implement military nuclear programmes
- Verifiable cessation of the build-up of conventional weapons coupled with efforts to resolve other international issues, including settlement of regional conflicts

I would like to dwell particularly on the relationship between “offensive” and “defensive” weapons. Real progress in nuclear disarmament cannot be achieved in a situation where unilateral efforts to develop strategic ABM systems undermine this relationship. This is fraught with the risk that strategic stability will be eroded and the system of checks and balances that ensures global parity will be disturbed.

(Mr. Lavrov, Russian Federation)

In a spirit of strategic openness, we propose a constructive alternative to unilateral plans in this crucial area, i.e. to combine the efforts of all States interested in counteracting potential missile threats. Our package proposal with regard to developing cooperation remains on the negotiating table. We will develop and elaborate on it, and we are ready for joint work based on equitable partnership.

Ensuring effective and sustainable implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which is of pivotal importance for global security, and enhancement of its universality, incontestably remains a priority. We deem it necessary to prepare for the forthcoming NPT Review Conference in 2010 agreed recommendations that would provide for the Treaty to remain in force as a crucially important instrument to control the threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons. We need to ensure that the parties to the Treaty unconditionally fulfil their obligations embodied in the indivisibility of the three fundamental pillars - non-proliferation, peaceful use of atomic energy and disarmament. The May session of the Preparatory Committee for the Review Conference provides a good opportunity to reach agreement on ways to step up negotiations in all those areas.

Strengthening of the international regime for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the limitation of nuclear arms is inextricably linked to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Russia ratified this Treaty in the year 2000. We have consistently advocated its early entry into force. The moratorium on nuclear tests, with all its importance, cannot serve as a substitute for legal obligations. Therefore we call upon all States whose accession is necessary for the Treaty's entry into force to sign and ratify it as soon as possible. We have of course noted positive signals from Washington regarding the possibility of modifying its position on the CTBT, and expect that those signals will be embodied in specific decisions by President Barak Obama's Administration.

Strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and achieving peace and security regionally and globally, will promote the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones. We welcome the completion of the process whereby all parties have ratified the Treaty on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, allowing for its entry into force.

The task of strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the Middle East remains urgent. We consistently call for this region to become a zone free of nuclear weapons, and eventually free from all other types of weapons of mass destruction. In 1995 and 2000, the parties to the NPT took decisions on Middle East issues, as referred to in resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. Mutually acceptable approaches to their implementation need to be sought within the context of the forthcoming Treaty review. We stand ready for joint work in this area too.

IAEA verification activities need to be made more effective. The Additional Protocol to the Safeguards Agreement, ratified by Russia in 2007, is an efficient tool for enhancing the Agency's capacities in this field. We call on all countries to become parties to it. Eventually, the Additional Protocol should become a universal standard used to verify compliance by States with their NPT non-proliferation obligations, and a new major standard in the field of nuclear exports.

(Mr. Lavrov, Russian Federation)

Growing interest in peaceful nuclear energy is one of the trends in current economic development. Energy security and climate are in one way or another linked to peaceful nuclear applications, which should be used more widely in full accordance with the NPT States parties' inalienable right to develop nuclear energy research, production and use for peaceful purposes. This opens up new opportunities for international cooperation, primarily to ensure stable and secure supplies of nuclear fuel for countries developing their nuclear energy sector, subject to due compliance with the requirements of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Multilateral approaches that could offer an economically sound and feasible alternative to the development of all elements of the nuclear fuel cycle at the national level are enjoying increasing importance.

Quite a few initiatives have also been put forward in this field in recent years. Russia suggested that joint work should be carried out to develop global nuclear energy infrastructure through the establishment of multilateral centres for the supply of nuclear fuel cycle services. The International Uranium Enrichment Centre has already been established in partnership with Kazakhstan at the Angarsk enrichment plant. We welcome the decision of Armenia and Ukraine to join this Centre, as well as the interest shown by a number of other countries. The Angarsk Centre plans to create a buffer stock of low-enriched uranium under IAEA supervision to ensure guaranteed supplies of fuel in the event of market failure.

Our ability to respond in an adequate and timely manner to the threat of nuclear terrorism is a prerequisite for ensuring the security of every State and the entire world community. The Russian-American Global Initiative to Combat Acts of Nuclear Terrorism put forward in 2006 is a major contribution in this direction. The Initiative is already being implemented and is growing in scale - 75 States have joined it to date. We are convinced that it will enjoy even broader support in the future. This is a good example of how it is possible to cooperate in the modern world to find responses to new challenges and threats.

We support the revitalization of multilateral diplomacy, primarily within the United Nations and the Conference on Disarmament. We note the major contribution of the Conference to the strengthening of international security. We express gratitude to all delegations and to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, for their efforts to enhance the effectiveness of this forum, including their persistent efforts to build consensus with regard to the programme of work of the Conference.

Preventing the militarization of outer space is of particular importance among disarmament issues. When we introduced a draft international treaty on prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space in this Conference last February on behalf of Russia and China, we felt that it was easier to prevent the arrival of weapons in outer space than to get rid of large new stockpiles of weapons afterwards. The prevention of an arms race in outer space will also contribute to making the strategic situation predictable and preserving the integrity of orbital assets. All States using outer space for peaceful purposes should have an interest in this.

(Mr. Lavrov, Russian Federation)

Shortly, together with China, we plan to put before you for consideration a document summing up the outcome of the discussions which have already taken place in the Conference and outlining a response to the comments received regarding the draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space. We expect this document to serve as useful input to future negotiations.

A year ago in this forum Russia also introduced a draft containing the basic elements of an international legal agreement on the elimination of intermediate-range and shorter-range (ground-launched) missiles. We reiterate our call for a detailed discussion of this initiative, which has already gained a great deal of support. Our idea is echoed by the European-Union-backed proposals made by French President Nicolas Sarkozy for the start of negotiations on banning intermediate-range and shorter-range ground-to-ground missiles. We stand ready for a constructive dialogue with both the European Union and all other partners on possible ways of dealing with these issues with a view to establishing a universal regime banning this type of missile.

We are also prepared to start negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes, which would become an important milestone in the processes of nuclear disarmament and strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In conclusion, I would like to state the following. In our view, the efforts being made to harmonize the priority items on the Conference agenda so that it can resume its substantive work are inextricably linked with the general search for ways to overcome the critical phenomena in today's world, be it in the financial/economic, military/political, environmental or other areas. We can solve the problems we are facing now only through joint action, by restoring trust in global politics and making collective efforts meeting the interests of all States and the world community as a whole. Russia is open to constructive dialogue and stands ready to work jointly with all its partners. The right moment has come today, for the first time since the end of the cold war, for making real progress in resuming the global disarmament process on a broad agenda. I am convinced that we should not miss this opportunity.

Thank you for your attention. I wish you success in your work this year.

The PRESIDENT: On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament I should like to thank the Foreign Minister for his statement. The Foreign Minister has a very tight schedule, and he would now like to proceed to a news conference. I thank you all.

Our meeting stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.