
Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand five hundred and sixty-second plenary meeting

Held via videoconference on Wednesday, 24 February 2021, at 10 a.m. Central European Time

President: Mr. Gonçalo de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão..... (Brazil)



The President: Good morning, Excellencies, Ms. Tatiana Valovaya, distinguished delegates, and thank you for participating in today's meeting. Today, we will continue the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. As indicated earlier, I intend in principle to take all rights of reply and points of order, if there are any, at the end of the high-level segment this afternoon.

To start our work today, the Conference will hear an address by Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. President, distinguished colleagues, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak at this authoritative forum.

In every possible way, 2020 was a difficult year. The ongoing breakdown of the existing international regimes for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation intensified, while the tensions and deficit of trust among United Nations Member States increased. Unfortunately, the United States continued taking steps to replace international law and the central role of the United Nations with a "rules-based international order" dictated by Washington. In 2020, following its exit in 2018 from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – a plan concerning the Iranian nuclear programme – and its dismantling in 2019 of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), the United States decided to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies, a decision that undermined international security.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic also made the work of all multilateral forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, more difficult. All channels of traditional diplomatic communication and interaction were essentially blocked.

Only this year have a few encouraging signs appeared. I am thinking mainly of the recent extension of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START), which still has a fundamental role in maintaining strategic stability and international security. This extension has made it possible to ensure that for the next few years there will be a reasonable level of predictability in relations between Russia and the United States, which have the largest nuclear arsenals. In addition, it has paved the way for further negotiations on arms control, which must take into consideration all factors affecting strategic stability.

Restraint in relation to missiles remains a matter of the utmost importance in the context of the termination of the INF Treaty. Our proposal remains valid: we will not deploy this type of land-based missile in regions where the equivalent American-made assets are not deployed. We call on the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to take similar action in return. Our specific proposals on reciprocal verification measures are well known.

The danger of an arms race in outer space is growing. The United States and its allies have actually embarked on the path of using near-Earth space to conduct military operations, including offensive operations, and to deploy strike weapons systems. Russia is committed to its obligations regarding the non-discriminatory use and exploration of outer space for peaceful purposes. It is still possible to come up with generally acceptable legally binding measures that can prevent armed confrontation in outer space. The Russian and Chinese draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects, submitted here at the Conference, is a good basis for this.

Russia continues to make a significant practical contribution to nuclear disarmament. Further progress in this regard requires the involvement of all States with military nuclear capabilities, including the United Kingdom and France. Russia is open to consensus-based multilateral dialogue, which must take place with respect for the legitimate interests of all parties and with their consent.

We consistently support the reconfirmation by Russia, the United States and the other nuclear-weapon States of the basic principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. I repeated this principle of ours to Secretary of State Antony Blinken in our telephone conversation of 4 February 2021.

We consider the continuation of nuclear-sharing by NATO, in violation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, to be unacceptable. American nuclear weapons must be returned to the territory of the United States, and the foreign infrastructure for their deployment must be dismantled.

The central event of the year will be the Review Conference of the parties to the Treaty, the key instrument of international law for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and a foundation of the modern world order. All States parties must do everything possible to ensure that the Review Conference helps strengthen the Treaty. We must pool our efforts to consolidate all three harmoniously interrelated pillars of the Treaty (non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy).

In the context of the Treaty review, it will also be necessary to take a constructive approach to the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and to the situation with the Iranian nuclear programme. We call on everyone, especially the new Administration of the United States of America, to step up their efforts in these crucial matters for the international community.

The situation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons needs to be rectified. We are opposed to the abusive practice of using the Organisation to put pressure on “undesirable” States through sanctions based on evidence-free accusations of the use of chemical weapons. We support impartial and professional dialogue based not on conspiracy theories described as “highly likely” but on facts and on the honest fulfilment by the technical secretariat of the requirements of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We consider the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention a priority for the international community. We are prepared for constructive work on the preparation and successful organization of the Review Conference for the Convention scheduled for this year. We are urging support for Russian initiatives to reinforce the institutional foundations of the Convention.

In our efforts, we reserve the leading role for the United Nations and its disarmament mechanism. At the Conference on Disarmament, we intend to continue facilitating the approval of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work in accordance with the negotiating mandate of the forum, while respecting the fundamental principles of its functioning, especially the consensus rule. To achieve such a consensus, we call once again for the serious consideration of the Russian initiative to develop at the Conference an international convention for the suppression of acts of chemical and biological terrorism.

It is high time that we revive the work of the Disarmament Commission by settling the organizational issues, including by ensuring unimpeded access to New York for the representatives of all Member States to participate in United Nations events.

More than ever, we all need constructive dialogue to prevent further deterioration of the international arms control architecture. Given its unique status as the only negotiating forum for disarmament, the Conference has the potential to make a significant contribution to addressing the current challenging situation in international security and help build confidence among States.

I wish the Conference participants success in their work.

The President: I thank Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation very much. We will now hear an address by Mr. Vladimir Makei, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus.

Mr. Makei (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The last third of the previous century could certainly be called the golden age of disarmament diplomacy. The treaties and agreements concluded during that period, including at the predecessor of the Conference on Disarmament, the Committee on Disarmament, laid down the framework for international security and strategic stability.

The Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention established global prohibitions on the development and use of these two types of weapons of mass destruction.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was a turning point for the large-scale reductions of their nuclear arsenals by the Soviet Union and the United States of America and the renunciation of nuclear weapons by South Africa, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, as well as my own country, Belarus, moves that led to a lower nuclear threat and a lower risk of possible nuclear confrontation.

The hope that the new post-cold war system of international relations would be based on mutual respect and cooperation rather than rivalry led to a false sense of security. Peace and security were taken for granted. Disarmament and arms control, seemingly obsolete matters, were pushed aside.

Unfortunately, in the past twenty years, the world has not become more stable or predictable. In our view, the systemic foundations of international security are deteriorating. Trust is being supplanted by confrontation and dialogue by accusatory rhetoric. A spiralling new arms race is under way.

Multilateral mechanisms for non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament are fragmenting and eroding, held hostage to politicized approaches, mutual accusations and the desire for unilateral military advantage.

It is important to understand that in the context of a security crisis, turbulence and deepening rifts between key global players, the disarmament agenda is of prime importance for the entire international community. Disregarding international agreements on disarmament and arms control helps increase mistrust and tension, leads to a danger of military confrontation and creates the conditions for conflict. Armed conflict, however, leads to the reversal of socioeconomic gains and the destruction of human values, sets the development of States back years and is fertile ground for organized crime and terrorism.

The extension by Russia and the United States of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) is a major step towards reversing this negative trend. We believe that this decision will lay a firm foundation both for the reinforcement of existing arms control and disarmament mechanisms and for the development of new agreements on the subject.

Belarus, as reaffirmed in its proposal to resume international dialogue to overcome military and political tensions and restore trust, is prepared for substantive and constructive work to that end. For that reason, we have put forward initiatives to draft a multilateral political declaration on the non-deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe to fill the legal vacuum left by the termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and to establish a “digital neighbours belt” to reduce the risk of a confrontation in cyberspace.

The Conference on Disarmament has proved itself as the sole forum for negotiations on a wide range of pressing issues related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. Unfortunately, like many other disarmament mechanisms, it is in a state of protracted crisis. In this regard, Belarus, which presided over the final part of the Conference’s 2020 session, has worked towards revitalizing the work of this negotiating forum and making full use of its untapped potential.

We should make every possible effort to resolve our disagreements and quickly begin substantive work at the Conference on the basis of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work and within the limits of its mandate.

We are sure that the positive impact of progress in disarmament will inevitably spill over into other areas of cooperation. Effective and durable solutions for international security and disarmament are directly tied to peace, stability, sustainable development and, ultimately, the very existence of humanity.

The President: I thank Mr. Vladimir Makei, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus. We will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Audun Halvorsen, State Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

Mr. Halvorsen (Norway): Mr. President, Norway is fully committed to the objective of total elimination of nuclear weapons. This can be achieved only through balanced, mutual, irreversible and verifiable elimination of such weapons. For more than twenty years, the Conference on Disarmament has been at an impasse. We need to resume substantive work in

the Conference and to seek compromises that can gradually return it to its role as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum that the United Nations General Assembly designated it to be.

Mr. President, 2021 will be an important year for international arms control and nuclear disarmament. The tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty is an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the Treaty in enhancing global security. The Treaty is the cornerstone of our common efforts on nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Over the past five decades, the global stockpile of nuclear weapons has been substantially reduced, the proliferation of nuclear weapons has been curtailed and the benefits of civilian applications of nuclear energy and technology have been shared globally. In short, the Treaty has been a success.

At the ministerial meeting in Berlin last year, a cross-regional group of 16 countries identified 22 concrete actions, or stepping stones, for progress on nuclear disarmament. We encourage all States to study this proposal and support these actions.

Norway considers the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty and the progress of multilateral work on nuclear disarmament verification key steps towards nuclear disarmament.

In its recommendations to the General Assembly in the autumn of 2019, the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which was chaired by Norway, underscored the key role of such verification in achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. A new group of experts will start work on nuclear disarmament verification later this year. Norway is ready to continue leading this effort. And I encourage the Conference to give special attention to this issue.

We welcome the agreement between Presidents Biden and Putin to extend the New START for another five years. The Treaty contributes to stability and security, both globally and regionally, and provides an impetus for ongoing and future work on arms control and disarmament.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed our collective inadequacy in the face of large-scale biological health hazards. The preparations for the ninth Review Conference of the Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention will be starting in 2021. We must seize this opportunity to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention and its norms on assistance and cooperation. We call on all States to join the Convention.

Finally, I call on all Conference on Disarmament member States to become parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. These two conventions are among the most effective multilateral disarmament agreements in modern times and they contribute widely to establishing strong norms and preventing and alleviating humanitarian suffering. Thank you.

The President: I thank Mr. Audun Halvorsen, State Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway. And now we will hear an address by Ambassador Esmaeil Baghaei Hamaneh, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, it is an honour to speak on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Conference on Disarmament's high-level segment. Since this is the first time I take the floor during your presidency, I would like to congratulate you and Brazil on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. You may rest assured of our full support and cooperation.

The year 2021 will involve some critical developments for disarmament that can generate momentum to take the Conference forward as well. It began with the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 22 January, an important indication of the international community's collective demand for total nuclear disarmament. It will continue with the tenth Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

Iran attaches great importance to the Conference on Disarmament, its prospective role and its mandate. Despite the frustrating deadlock, this body remains the single multilateral negotiating forum for nuclear disarmament. The long stalemate that has prevented it from fulfilling its mandate in accordance with the Final Document of the first special session of

the General Assembly devoted to disarmament could be ended if all members, principally the nuclear-weapon States, demonstrated political will and lived up to their commitments on nuclear disarmament. We are looking forward to working with you and other delegations to craft a balanced and comprehensive programme of work on core issues as a necessary step in that direction.

As a victim of weapons of mass destruction that still suffers the wounds of chemical weapons used by Saddam's regime in the 1980s, Iran reiterates that the only guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is their total, irreversible and verifiable elimination. Pending that, the non-nuclear-weapon States do have the right to enjoy unconditional and irreversible legally binding assurances against the use or threat of use of such weapons.

The integrity and credibility of the Non-Proliferation Treaty depend on full implementation of all obligations set out therein, including article VI, concerning nuclear disarmament. The tenth Review Conference should be taken as an opportunity to reinforce this vision and to revive collective commitment to the decisions of past review conferences on the three pillars of the Treaty. One such important commitment is the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, in which reference was made to the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. The international efforts to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, first initiated by Iran in 1974, have been effectively blocked by the United States and its allies as part of their acquiescence to the real source of proliferation in the region – that is, the Israeli regime, which keeps accumulating all kinds of weapons of mass destruction without being subject to any accountability, safeguards or verification mechanism.

Recent press reports about the secret expansion of the Dimona nuclear site, the only nuclear weapon factory in the region, were not met by even an expression of concern on the part of the United States or its European allies. This is indeed a matter of grave concern and a serious threat to regional peace and security. We call upon those States that have always closed their eyes to every atrocity of this regime to abandon this double standard and urge Israel to join the Treaty and put all its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards and verification regime.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear programme has been and continues to be absolutely peaceful, as has been certified time and again by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran's rejection of nuclear weapons is based on solid religious and moral grounds and sound geopolitical facts. Iran's determination in pursuing its peaceful nuclear programme in maximum transparency and full compliance with Treaty and safeguards commitments is unmatched.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was devised as a further tool to allay any concern, real or concocted, regarding our nuclear programme. Iran stood committed impeccably to the Plan despite all the violations by the United States and some other participants, even one full year after the United States pulled out.

The manner in which a number of speakers referred to the Plan and Iran during the past two days of high-level debate should be regretted as unfair, preposterous, misleading, irresponsible, arrogant and even bullying. It is absurd to keep asking Iran to return to full compliance while you yourself either stay totally out of the agreement and in absolute material breach of its terms or remain in significant non-performance of your commitments in your bid to appease the major violator. As a reminder, it was not Iran that withdrew from the agreement on May 2018 and aggressively coerced others into following suit in total contempt of the principle *pacta sunt servanda* and in grave violation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015).

Nor was it Iran that failed to honour its commitments with a view to appeasing the bullying party. And, as a refresher, the offending party, the United States, is still a non-participant in the Plan, still the tremendous violator of the Plan, as it continues to carry on with the criminal and wrongful legacy of the previous Administration. It is actions that matter, not words. The onus is on the offending party to return, restart and compensate for the damages, as well as to provide assurances that it will not renege again.

There is a path forward, with a logical sequence, as Minister Zarif recently outlined. As the offending side, the United States must take corrective measures, commit to the Plan and effectively fulfil obligations before expecting Iran, the injured party, to reverse its remedial measures that are taken in strict accordance with paragraphs 26 and 36 of the Plan, following the highly consequential unilateral withdrawal by the United States and the multiple forms of and persisting significant non-performance by the European Union and France, Germany and the United Kingdom. I thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Ambassador Baghaei Hamaneh, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Conference on Disarmament, including for his kind words for this presidency. Now we will hear an address by Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

Mr. Gallagher (Holy See): Mr. President, Madam Director-General and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Excellencies and distinguished delegates, allow me, at the outset, to convey the most cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis to you all, as well as his hope that this Conference will swiftly overcome impasses through a renewed sentiment of urgency and co-responsibility. Confronted with the many security challenges the international community is facing today, it is essential that this Conference recognize that certain issues should transcend narrow individual interests by virtue of their contribution to the common good.

The desire for peace, security and stability is one of the deepest longings of the human heart. However, the present climate of reciprocal distrust and the erosion of multilateralism impedes the efforts aimed at achieving these noble aspirations. This is even more serious in the field of disarmament. While the importance of disarmament is particularly evident for nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, it applies just as strongly to the increased military competition in outer space, as well as in the fields of cyberspace and artificial intelligence such as lethal autonomous weapon systems. Here, as elsewhere, States have common responsibilities, which give rise to concrete limits that must be observed in the interest of our common humanity.

The Holy See is also concerned about the illicit traffic of small arms and light weapons, as well as about explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas, which have become less and less conventional and more and more weapons of mass destruction and displacement, wreaking havoc on cities, schools, hospitals, places of worship and basic infrastructure for the civilian population, and affecting its integral human development prospects.

Disarmament, development and peace are three interdependent issues. The huge military expenditures, far beyond what is needed to assure legitimate defence, foment the vicious cycle of a seemingly endless arms race, which prevents potential resources from addressing poverty, inequality, injustice, education and health. The link of national security to the accumulation of weapons is a false logic and remains a scandal, as it facilitates the continuous crying disproportion between the resources in money and intelligence devoted to the service of death and the resources devoted to the service of life.

At the same time, there are a number of encouraging signs, such as the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the extension for another five-year period of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

The Holy See wishes to reiterate that a world free of nuclear weapons is both possible and necessary. This conviction, reinforced by the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, is also embodied in the spirit of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and especially in article VI, which is a binding legal obligation for all States parties.

The Holy See looks forward to the forthcoming Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, trusting that it will result in concrete action in accordance with our joint intention to achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to undertake effective measures in the direction of nuclear disarmament. Ultimately, both the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Non-Proliferation Treaty are inspired and driven by the very same moral

imperatives and objectives. They mutually reinforce and complement each other, demonstrating how zealous the desire for peace, security and stability truly is.

In no way does the Holy See intend to overlook the complexity of disarmament and arms control. It is for this reason that it wishes humbly to submit to the member States of this Conference the following two proposals.

First, the Holy See would like to encourage the Conference on Disarmament to engage in an expert study on the issue of verification, which could inform possible future negotiations on disarmament and arms control. This is of particular importance with regard to nuclear disarmament, but it could also be applied for other types of weapons as well. In this regard, it is worthwhile to make use of the opportunities offered by new technologies to enhance reliable verification. The work of verification, besides being an incredibly valuable confidence-building measure, is a fundamental component in ensuring the efficacy of treaties under the well-known adage “trust and verify”.

Second, the Holy See also considers that the resumption of a formal discussion on limitations of armaments and on general and complete disarmament, under effective systems of control and verification, would be extremely beneficial to the work of this Conference. This is even truer if we take into consideration the principal threats to peace and security with their many dimensions in this multipolar world of the twenty-first century, including, for example, terrorism, asymmetrical conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental problems, poverty. These threats call us to respond with a more cohesive and responsible cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic is also showing us dramatically the need to move in this direction. As Pope Francis has often noted, we will only be able to overcome the current crisis if we work together, as a united human family. Indeed, no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Confronted with the enormous challenges the international community is facing today, disarmament can no longer be considered an optional objective. It is an ethical imperative. The Holy See encourages this Conference to adopt a renewed conviction of urgency and commitment to achieve concrete and durable agreements towards peace and fraternity. Certain issues should rise above consensus, transcending individual interests and agendas. Tomorrow may be too late. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President: I thank Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See very much, including for the interest as an observer, as shown by the proposals he just made. I now give the floor to Mr. Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Safadi (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and I affirm my country’s support for the efforts aimed at ensuring that the Conference achieves concrete results to move towards our common goal of nuclear disarmament and the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

We are meeting as the world faces the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its consequences, which have confirmed the interdependence of our security and our interests and the centrality of multilateral action.

Our Conference is one of the channels of collective action that plays a key role in building comprehensive security by working to reduce a common threat. For that reason, the role of the Conference in disarmament issues must be activated, and efforts must be made to break the stalemate that has hampered the Conference for more than two decades because of disagreement on a clear programme of work to reach a binding international instrument on disarmament.

I underscore the need for the Conference to focus on expanding its membership, as increased membership means increased participation in decision-making, and thus increased acceptance of decisions.

Mr. President, Jordan emphasizes the importance of supporting all initiatives aimed at activating international efforts in the area of disarmament, particularly of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. We call for the launch of a comprehensive and balanced dialogue to ensure the success of the tenth Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review

Conference, to be held in New York this year, through the adoption of a comprehensive document that reflects a broader consensus in the field of disarmament.

As part of its pursuit of this goal, Jordan became a founding member of the Stockholm Initiative on Nuclear Disarmament and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, launched in Sweden in 2019, with the aim of strengthening disarmament diplomacy under the Treaty. Jordan recently hosted the third ministerial conference of the Stockholm Initiative, which adopted an expanded programme of work to make this year's tenth NPT Review Conference a success.

In 2019, Jordan also chaired the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. I stress here the need to implement the 1995 Review Conference resolution on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. I reiterate the call for the sponsors of the resolution to redouble their efforts to make progress in its implementation as soon as possible.

Resolving regional conflicts and crises will contribute significantly to building an environment conducive to limiting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, work to resolve these conflicts must be intensified, especially in the Middle East. The region is at a crossroads: either there will be more conflict and therefore more weapons or it will build a regional environment of cooperation, dialogue and peace, and thus more construction and more capacity to build security and achievement and create opportunities.

Thank you, Mr. President. Please rest assured of my country's support for your good efforts.

The President: I thank Mr. Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan.

(spoke in Spanish)

Distinguished delegates, I have the pleasure to give the floor to Augusto Santos Silva, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

Mr. Silva (Portugal): Mr. President, dear colleagues, I am pleased to address today the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of Ambassador Gonçalo Mourão of Brazil, to whom I address my congratulations for assuming this important role.

Portugal strongly believes in the power of effective multilateralism and international cooperation. This Conference has a unique role and place in the framework of the international bodies dealing with non-proliferation, disarmament and related issues.

Allow me to express our deep regret that the member States of the European Union and four other Member States of the United Nations have been denied the possibility of observing the work of this year's session. We invite both Turkey and Iran to review their positions in this matter.

Portugal strongly supports the efforts to overcome the stalemate in the Conference and to advance the multilateral disarmament agenda. If the Conference is to retake its place as the relevant negotiating body, countries need to take immediate action. We remain committed to a progressive and pragmatic approach to achieving nuclear disarmament and believe that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) remains the best route to work towards a world without nuclear weapons with no short cuts in the process.

The NPT Review Conference is scheduled to take place this summer, and it is crucial to strive for a results-oriented process that would better promote the universalization of the Treaty and strengthen its implementation. The only credible way towards nuclear disarmament is a step-by-step approach that considers the wider security context. That is why we all should make a serious effort to further strengthen its framework and take practical, effective and future-oriented actions at the Review Conference.

We also believe that one of the key steps towards irreversible nuclear disarmament is negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty, as well as the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

On other non-nuclear matters also dealt with by the Conference on Disarmament, some key areas are of particular concern to us. First, the repeated use in recent years of chemical weapons, gravely undermining the universal prohibition on the use of such weapons, and the increasing humanitarian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and against civilians.

Second, we are concerned by the apparent trend that has taken the form of relaxation by some countries of restrictions on the use of anti-personnel landmines. We take this occasion to invite all States to align themselves with and implement without delay the provisions of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

To conclude, concerning the enlargement of the Conference's membership, I would like to remind you that Portugal is one of the longest-standing observer States to have formally expressed interest in joining this body. I believe you would agree with us that there is no legitimate reason or moral justification for extending this limbo. That is why we expect to see a solution for this matter in the near future. Thank you very much.

The President: I thank Mr. Augusto Santos Silva, Minister of State and for Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished colleagues, this concludes our business for this morning. The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place this afternoon at 3 p.m., when we will hear the addresses of the high-level speakers on the list that has been circulated. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.