



General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

First Committee

1st meeting

Thursday, 3 October 2019, 3 p.m.

New York

Official Records

Chair: Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia (Plurinational State of))

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

of the previous Bureau for all of their hard work in ensuring the success of that session.

Agenda item 5

Election of the officers of the Main Committees

Election of the Chair and the Bureau of the First Committee

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I should like to extend a warm and sincere welcome to all delegations participating in the First Committee's deliberations at the seventy-fourth session. I should also like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to all Member States for the privilege and distinction they have bestowed upon my country and on me personally, through my election as Chair of this very important Committee.

I am indeed honoured and deeply indebted to all Committee members for the trust and confidence placed in me. I wish to assure all delegations that I shall do my utmost to discharge my responsibilities in a manner that ensures that our work is carried out efficiently and that our endeavours meet with success. I hope that our deliberations will be guided by a spirit of consensus and understanding.

Before proceeding to the matters at hand, I am sure that I speak on behalf of the entire membership of the Committee in extending our congratulations to Ambassador Ion Jinga of Romania for the skilful and effective manner in which he conducted the proceedings of the First Committee at the seventy-third session. I should also like to pay tribute to the other members

Before proceeding further, I would like to remind delegations that the Committee has to fill one more position of Vice-Chair. As members will recall, when the election of Bureau members for the seventy-fourth session took place on 4 June (see A/C.1/73/PV.32), nominations were pending for Vice-Chair from the Group of African States.

It is my pleasure to inform the Committee that the Group of African States has nominated Ms. Wendbigda Honorine Bonkougou of Burkina Faso for the remaining position of Vice-Chair for this session. Since no other candidate has been nominated, may I take it that the Committee wishes to elect by acclamation Ms. Wendbigda Honorine Bonkougou of Burkina Faso as Vice-Chair of the First Committee for the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I warmly congratulate Ms. Wendbigda Honorine Bonkougou on her election. I look forward to working closely with her, as well as with the other Vice-Chairs, Ms. Amal Mudallali of Lebanon; Mr. Peter Horne of Australia and Rapporteur Mrs. Szilvia Balázs of Hungary. I am pleased to report that, over the past weeks, we have developed a strong collegial and professional approach to our work, which certainly augurs well for this session of the Committee. At this time, I would also like to recognize the support of the Secretariat, in particular the Office for

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Disarmament Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

Organization of work

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): The Committee has before it document A/C.1/74/1, which contains the 20 agenda items allocated to the First Committee by the General Assembly at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 20 September. The Committee also has before it documents A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1 and A/C.1/74/CRP.2/Rev.1, which contain, respectively, the Committee's proposed programme of work and timetable for 2019 and the draft indicative timetable for the structured discussion of specific subjects on the adopted thematic approach on disarmament and international security agenda items.

Before taking up those documents one by one, with the Committee's indulgence, I should like to make some procedural remarks concerning the conduct of the Committee's work. I should also like to draw the Committee's attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly regarding the work of the Main Committees, as contained in the report of the General Committee in document A/74/250.

In order to make full use of the time and conference services made available to the Committee, with its cooperation and support, I shall convene the meetings of the Committee at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. sharp. Similarly, I shall adjourn the meetings punctually at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m., respectively. I therefore appeal to all speakers, especially the first three speakers at a given meeting, to kindly be present in the conference room on time. In that connection, I sincerely hope that all delegations will make a special effort during this session in order to enable the Committee to maintain, or even improve, the record of its utilization of conference facilities.

I should like to remind members that the Assembly has decided to continue its practice during this session of waiving the requirement that at least one quarter of the members be present in order to declare the Main Committee meetings open and permit the debates to proceed. The Assembly made that recommendation with the understanding that such a departure from the rules did not involve any permanent change in the provisions of rules 67 and 108 of its rules of procedure.

On the question of explanations of vote, rights of reply and points of order, the Committee will conduct its work strictly in accordance with General Assembly

decision 34/401 (see A/520/Rev.17, annex V), which states that explanations of vote should be limited to 10 minutes. The first intervention in the exercise of the right of reply for any delegation, on any item at a given meeting, should be limited to 10 minutes, and the second intervention should be limited to five minutes. In line with the decision taken by the Assembly on 20 September, upon the recommendation of the General Committee, points of order should be limited to five minutes.

Returning to the organization of work of the Committee and the agenda items allocated to it, as set out in document A/C.1/74/1, I would like to draw the attention of the members of the Committee to the following.

First, some portions of the annual report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is to be considered directly in plenary meeting under item 88, deal with the subject matter of item 98, entitled "General and complete disarmament". I have been informed that the Assembly will consider the report of IAEA tentatively on Monday, 11 November.

Secondly, agenda item 121, entitled "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly", is allocated to the First Committee for the purpose of discussing its working methods, as well as considering and taking action on its tentative programme of work for the Committee's next session in 2020. In that connection, the attention of the Committee is invited to a note by the Secretariat, contained in document A/C.1/74/INF/4, which highlights the provisions of General Assembly resolution 73/341 on "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly". Included in that document is the rotation of the Chairs of the Committee, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/313.

Lastly, agenda item 136, entitled "Programme planning", is allocated to all the Main Committees and the plenary of the General Assembly. Its aim is to enhance discussion of evaluation, planning, budgeting and monitoring reports. So far, I have not received any information concerning that item.

I will now highlight a few details related to the Committee's proposed programme of work and timetable, as outlined in document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1, which is based on General Assembly decision 73/515 of 5 December 2018. As indicated in document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1, the First Committee will commence its substantive work on

Monday, 7 October. It will hold a total of 27 substantive meetings and should conclude its work by 8 November, as approved by the General Assembly.

In accordance with established practice, it is proposed that three additional meetings be held on 16 and 24 October and 4 November, if necessary and if services are available. In order to proceed with the work of the Committee, it will be determined whether or not those meetings are necessary. In accordance with established practice and as currently reflected in the provisional programme of work for this session, the First Committee will conduct its work in three phases. The first phase is the general debate on all agenda items. The second phase is a thematic discussion on specific subjects. The third phase is action on all draft proposals. I shall reflect briefly on what we should expect under each segment.

The general debate on all items will run from 7 to 16 October, for a total of eight meetings. I have been informed that, during that segment, the President of the General Assembly will address the First Committee on Monday, 7 October. Also during that segment, the Committee will have its usual exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs on the follow-up to the draft resolutions and draft decisions adopted by the Committee at its previous sessions and on the presentation of reports. That exchange is scheduled to take place on 16 October. At the end of the general debate, the Committee will devote at least half a meeting — 90 minutes — to hear statements by representatives of civil society in an informal setting, following which delegations will be given the floor to make comments or pose questions to the speakers.

To maximize the time available to us during the general debate, I propose that we maintain the practice of using a rolling list of speakers, which is currently open to all delegations wishing to take the floor. As in previous years, inscription on the list of speakers is through the e-speaker tool on the e-deleGATE web portal. I am aware that a considerable number of delegations have already inscribed their names on the list, and I invite those who intend to speak but have not yet inscribed their names to do so as soon as possible. As indicated on the programme of work, the list of speakers for the general debate will be closed on Tuesday, 8 October, at 6 p.m. I would also like to remind all delegations to keep in mind that a rolling list implies that they should be prepared to intervene at any

time, possibly even one meeting sooner than they had originally planned to speak.

To make the most efficient use of the resources allocated to us, I would like to urge all delegations taking the floor to kindly respect the time limits for statements of eight minutes when speaking in a national capacity and 13 minutes when speaking on behalf of groups of delegations. I would encourage participants to keep to those time limits to address genuine time-management concerns expressed by delegations over the years. In that regard, delegations with relatively long statements should deliver a concise summary of their texts and submit the full statement in written form for posting on PaperSmart.

The second stage of the Committee's work will focus on thematic discussions on specific subjects, as well as the introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions and draft decisions submitted under the Committee's agenda items. That segment will run from the afternoon of Thursday, 17 October, to Thursday, 31 October, for a total of 12 meetings. In line with the Committee's established practice, the details of the programme of work for our thematic segment are contained in the indicative timetable outlined in document A/C.1/74/CRP.2/Rev.1.

During the second phase, the Committee will take up the respective subject areas listed in the timetable, comprising the seven clusters on which it has traditionally focused during that phase of its work: "Nuclear weapons", "Other weapons of mass destruction", "Outer space (disarmament aspects)", "Conventional weapons", "Other disarmament measures and international security", "Regional disarmament and security" and "Disarmament machinery". For each of the seven clusters, our proceedings will comprise two parts. The first part will begin in a formal mode, with a panel or guest speakers, as applicable, and will be followed by an informal question-and-answer segment, during which delegations taking the floor will need to ask concise questions rather than read out statements. The second part will be in a formal mode and consist of interventions by delegations, including the introduction of draft resolutions and draft decisions.

(spoke in English)

I would now like to touch on the exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and other high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament. The Bureau conducted extensive

outreach and consultations with Member States and took into account the diverse views that continue to be expressed by delegations on that critical issue. Taking into account the views expressed during the consultations, the Bureau has proposed that the Committee retain the segment on the exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs on the follow-up to the draft resolutions and draft decisions adopted by the Committee at its previous sessions and on the presentation of reports, scheduled for Wednesday, 16 October (see A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1).

In addition, the Bureau wishes to propose, as reflected in document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1, that the high-level exchanges at the beginning of the thematic debate, which will take place on Thursday, 17 October, be renamed “Exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and briefings by other high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament”. It is proposed that the nomination of high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament for those briefings be made by each of the regional groups from all interested entities within the United Nations system, as well as from the intergovernmental organizations and other entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the session and the work of the General Assembly.

The Chair will send letters to the Chairs of the month for the regional groups, inviting them to make their nominations. Subsequently, the invitations to the high-level officials, as nominated by the regional groups for participation in the briefings, will be extended by the Chair on behalf of the Committee. In that regard, documents A/C.1/74/CRP.1 and A/C.1/74/CRP.2 have been revised accordingly and circulated as documents A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1 and A/C.1/74/CRP.2/Rev.1 through the e-deleGATE portal. Copies are also available in the room.

Apart from the two above-mentioned segments, document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1 indicates all other panel discussions and briefings that will be held during the thematic segment. The Committee will hold a panel discussion under cluster 7, “Disarmament machinery”, and introductory statements and briefings under clusters 1, 3, and 4 to 6.

(spoke in Spanish)

Delegations are reminded that the joint panel discussion of the First and Fourth Committees on possible challenges to space security and sustainability

will take place on the morning of Wednesday, 30 October. The Secretariat has already circulated the programme for the panel discussion to all members and a copy is available on the website of the First Committee. The Committee will therefore meet all day on 14, 22, 29 and 30 October, according to its programme of work. On 24 October at 12:30 p.m., the Committee will hold the traditional certificate award ceremony for graduating Disarmament Fellows.

The list of speakers for the thematic segment will open on Thursday, 10 October via the e-speaker tool for the First Committee on the e-deleGATE web portal. As indicated in the programme of work, the deadline for inscription on the list of speakers for the thematic discussions is Tuesday, 22 October, at 6 p.m. Thereafter, the list will close. All delegations wishing to take the floor during that segment of our work are therefore urged to make every effort to inscribe on the list of speakers before the stipulated deadline.

During the thematic segment, delegations taking the floor are strongly encouraged to limit statements in their national capacity to five minutes and statements on behalf of a group of countries should not exceed seven minutes. With the understanding of Committee, I intend to apply those time limits faithfully, to enable us to complete our work on schedule. Once again, I urge all delegations wishing to take the floor at this stage to kindly prepare their statements in accordance with the noted time limits.

The third, and last, segment of the work of the Committee, namely, action on all draft resolutions and draft decisions, will run from Thursday, 1 November to Thursday, 8 November, for a total of six meetings. After consultations with the Bureau of the Fourth Committee, it is proposed that the First Committee meet in the afternoon of 6 and 7 November.

There will be no formal meetings of the Committee scheduled on Wednesday 9 October or Monday 28 October, since the United Nations will observe the floating holidays of Yom Kippur and Diwali, respectively. Members are asked to kindly note that while the Committee will aim to conclude its work on Thursday, 7 November, there is an option to hold a meeting on 8 November, if necessary.

As indicated in the programme of work, the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions and draft decisions is Thursday, 17 October, at noon. Compliance with that deadline will provide sufficient

time to delegations for consultations and also ensure the timely issuance of all drafts in all official languages. Sponsors and co-sponsors of draft resolutions and draft decisions wishing to schedule informal consultations on their drafts are encouraged to begin as soon as possible, in order to ensure that they have sufficient time for those consultations. Delegations that need assistance in booking conference rooms in that regard should contact the Secretariat.

Taking into account the lessons learned from the Committee's experience over the years on the need for the early determination of the programme budget implications of draft resolutions and draft decisions before the Committee, sponsors and co-sponsors organizing informal consultations on their drafts are encouraged to engage Secretariat officials in the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Committee Secretary for guidance. A briefing will be held immediately after the adjournment of today's meeting, conducted by senior United Nations officials, on the programme budget implications process. I encourage delegations to actively participate in that briefing.

At the same time, I would like to remind all delegations that, in accordance with paragraph 12 of General Assembly decision 34/401, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee require sufficient time to review the programme budget implications of any draft resolution or draft decision before it can be acted upon by the General Assembly. The General Committee also drew the attention of the General Assembly to the views expressed by the ACABQ regarding the use of the phrase "within available resources", as set out in document A/54/7. Accordingly, the use of that phrase in draft resolutions and draft decisions should be avoided.

On a final note, delegations are reminded to consult the document entitled "Programme Budget Implications: Regulatory Framework, Process and Practice for the Main Committees", which was prepared by the United Nations Budget Division and is posted on the e-deleGATE website. It contains very useful information on the programme budget implications process for delegations as they make their preparations.

All submitted draft proposals will continue to be listed in a conference room paper and grouped under the seven clusters I mentioned. Delegations are reminded that the sponsoring of draft proposals will continue through the e-sponsorship tool on the e-deleGATE

portal. The technical briefing today by the Secretariat will also cover that tool.

During the action phase, the Committee will continue to be guided by the informal papers issued by the Secretariat containing the draft resolutions and draft decisions on which action will be taken each day. Those informal papers will be revised by the Secretariat on a daily basis in order to update the drafts that are ready for action at each of the remaining meetings. In that regard, I propose that the Committee retain the procedure it has followed in previous years, by which draft resolutions and draft decisions are grouped under the clusters to which I have referred.

During the action phase, a draft provisional programme of work and timetable for the seventy-fifth session will be issued as a conference room paper and circulated for the Committee's consideration and action. Closer to the final phase of our work, further information will be provided on how we will proceed, including on the traditional ground rules for taking action on draft resolutions and draft decisions, which are prepared by the Secretariat and made available on the e-deleGATE portal.

The documents before the Committee at this session, including those already issued or forthcoming, are listed in document A/C.1/74/INF/1. One of the forthcoming documents is a list of participants, which will be issued as A/C.1/74/INF/2. The e-list of participants module has been deployed for the lists of membership of the Main Committees and for the list of delegations to the seventy-fourth session. Permanent Missions' focal points should submit their participants' names in an online form and upload a scanned copy of the relevant note verbale. Each Mission will have to make only a single submission for all the Main Committees, as well as for the list of delegates to the seventy-fourth session. The deadline for submission is 25 October.

The Department of Global Communications will issue press releases with daily coverage of First Committee proceedings, which will be posted on the United Nations website a few hours after each meeting.

The Committee will now consider document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1. Before taking action on document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1, I shall give the floor to delegations for comments or questions on the information I have provided so far regarding the organization of the Committee's work for this session.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We propose that the adoption of the First Committee's programme of work be postponed for the following reason.

We are again forced to highlight an accumulation of problems in our common disarmament mechanism that, regrettably, remain unresolved. As members will recall, in April we were forced to block the work of the Disarmament Commission due to the denial of entry visas to the head of the Russian delegation by the relevant State authorities of the United States. Just last week, due to similar, arbitrary visa actions, the work of the Russian delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, during the high-level segment of the seventy-fourth session was under threat.

Moreover, at the same time, American authorities did not allow the participation of nearly the entire delegation of the Russian Federation in the eleventh Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Naturally, we did not fail to pay attention to this situation and expressed our strong protest to the American delegation, which we did at the meeting between Sergey Lavrov and Mike Pompeo on 27 September. We were promised that the situation would be addressed and were assured that there was no ill-will behind the actions of the United States authorities. Instead, certain technical issues were cited as the reason for the visa issues. At the same time, we also drew the Secretariat's attention to the unacceptable nature of such gross violations by the United States of its obligations.

Yesterday, our representative addressed the issue in great detail with the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. Today, I am forced to say that, regrettably, the American side has again demonstrated extreme disrespect and disregard for its obligations, to us and everyone present in the room. Because some of our experts were denied visas, the Russian delegation has again been put in a position that does not allow us to participate fully in the work of the First Committee.

I recall yet again that, in accordance with the provisions of the 1947 Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, the United States is obligated to ensure unimpeded access to the Headquarters of the United Nations to all official representatives of Member States, without exception, and to issue visas to those representatives, "free of

charge and as promptly as possible". The right to host the Headquarters of the United Nations is a privilege that was granted to the United States in exchange for the aforementioned guarantees. Washington has no basis for unilaterally preventing the representatives of States Members of the United Nations from participating in events conducted under its auspices, much less for deciding on their behalf who should or should not be part of or head a national delegation. We do not intend to accept such practices. We will not relinquish our legitimate right to determine the composition of our delegation for the events held here at the United Nations.

I would therefore like to officially request that the Secretariat present to the First Committee a report on the measures it has taken since November 2018 to ensure the access of representatives of the Russian Federation to Headquarters to participate in United Nations disarmament meetings and events. While the visa issue remains unresolved, we propose that a technical or procedural break be taken in order to address and settle the issue as soon as possible.

As soon as visas have been issued to every member of our delegation, without exception, we will be prepared to resume the official session. Until the United States complies with its obligations to the United Nations to ensure that all official representatives of the States Members of the United Nations can participate in its work, we propose moving to a mode of informal consultations. At the same time, we also ask the Secretariat and the Bureau to take effective measures to put an end to the practice whereby one member State brazenly blocks the participation of the delegations of other member States in the work of the First Committee.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore — and I think that members would agree with me here — that what is in play is not a series of coincidences but rather the intentional and brazen non-compliance of the United States with its obligations. In that context, and so as not to deprive all of us of the opportunity to have a substantive dialogue on the most important issues relating to disarmament and international security, regrettably, we have only one option before us. In order to normalize the work of the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission, we believe that there is a need to consider holding the relevant 2020 meetings outside of the territory of the United States, for example, in Vienna or Geneva. We are prepared to hold a substantive discussion on the matter during the current session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Al Arsan (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me, Mr. Chair, to say that we are pleased and proud to see you presiding over the First Committee at this session. We assure you that we stand ready to cooperate with you and provide you with our support in applying the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and in complying with the rules of procedures which would effectively and seriously contribute to achieving disarmament.

We did not want to reach this point. However, we cannot but to join the delegation of the Russian Federation in supporting its proposal to postpone the substantive discussions of the Committee as we are now faced with the violation of the Headquarters Agreement, in particular Sections 11, 12 and 27. Those sections focus primarily on the obligations of the host country, namely, to facilitate and not to prevent or impede the arrival of the representatives of any delegation to the United Nations and not to politicize that facilitation or make it contingent upon the host country's political relations with any given country.

What happened with the representatives of the Russian permanent delegation to the First Committee — which also happened with representatives of another country but I leave it to them to talk about it — is a violation, as I said, of Sections 11, 12 and 27 of the Headquarters Agreement. It is also a violation of the principle of fair and equitable representation adopted by the Charter of the Organization.

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to express our congratulations and support to you, Mr. Chair, on your election, and to the other members of the Bureau.

My delegation would also like to inform the Committee that the host country did not issue visas to 58 Iranian diplomats accompanying the President and the Foreign Minister of Iran during the high-level week. We also express our deep concern regarding the recent and ongoing suspension of the issuance of visas to Iranian diplomats by the Consular Section of the United States Embassy in Vienna because of a so-called technical problem. While our representatives, including those who are supposed to participate in the First Committee, applied on time for the United States visa, none of them have been issued visas, which affects the proper functioning of the Iranian delegation.

The obligations of the host country, with respect to the issuance of visas, are clear. Section 13 of the

Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations stipulates that when visas are required for persons to which that section refers, they shall be granted free of charge and as promptly as possible.

What we understand from those provisions and other relative provisions in the Headquarters Agreement is that the host country is under the obligation to issue visas as promptly as possible to ensure that all countries are able to represent themselves at the United Nations and guarantee the principle of the sovereign equality of States. That obligation should not be affected by or subject to any restrictions arising from bilateral relations with the host country.

We share the concerns expressed by the representatives of Russia and Syria on the non-issuance of visas to members of their delegations. We fully support the Russian proposal and suggestions made in the statement of the Russian representative.

Last but not least, we urge the United Nations family to find a way to properly implement the recommendations previously adopted on visa issues.

Mr. Knight (United States of America): Very briefly, we would like to reiterate our prior calls that the organizational meeting of the first Committee is not the proper forum in which to raise visa issues. The appropriate forum is the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. Our Russian colleague has indicated that the matter was discussed just yesterday by that Committee, which is seized of the matter.

The United States takes its obligations as host country to the United Nations Headquarters seriously, issuing visas to thousands of individuals each year to enable them to serve at the United Nations and take part in United Nations-sponsored events. One specific example in the case of Russia, for instance — more than 160 visas were issued for its delegation to attend the General Assembly this year. We deeply regret that the Russian Federation has chosen to take the First Committee process hostage and stop our work. We will be available to discuss the matter further with a view to hopefully embarking on a productive First Committee exercise during this session of the General Assembly.

Ms. Sánchez Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, the delegation of Cuba would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your election to preside

over the work of the First Committee at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly.

The delegation of Cuba supports the legitimate right of all States Members of the United Nations that are recognized by the Charter of the United Nations to participate equally and without discrimination in the work of the General Assembly, including of the First Committee and its subsidiary bodies.

As a country that has been affected by this issue on countless occasions, Cuba rejects the practice of the United States, in its capacity as host country, of selectively and arbitrarily implementing the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations with a view to preventing — by delaying or denying the issuance of visas — the access of representatives of a State Member of the United Nations and the full and equal participation of those representatives in the work and negotiations of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, including the First Committee.

We firmly reject any interference in the composition of delegations and in the representation of Member States in meetings of the United Nations, which are the exclusive prerogative and sovereign decision of each Member State. We deeply deplore the fact that, because of the failure of the host country to comply with its international obligations, as stipulated in sections 11, 12 and 27 of the Headquarters Agreement and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961, the start of the organizational meeting of the First Committee has been delayed. The United States should facilitate, not impede, the access of the members of official delegations of Member States to the work of the United Nations.

Cuba fully supports the work of the Committee and reaffirms its validity and relevance as the forum in which to address pressing disarmament and international security issues. We urge that every diplomatic effort be taken and the necessary arrangements made at all possible levels to find a solution that would allow the work of the Committee to begin on time.

The representatives of the member States meeting here cannot allow the operations and the work of the First Committee or of any other Committee of the United Nations or its subsidiary bodies to be held hostage to political agendas, which would pose a serious threat to

multilateralism as a basic principle of disarmament and non-proliferation negotiations.

Lastly, we reaffirm the central role of the First Committee and of the General Assembly in matters related to disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I cannot help but to respond to the comments made by our American colleagues. We deplore the attempt to place the blame for this complex situation on Russia. We are not the ones not issuing visas to the American side; it is the American side that is not issuing visas to us. And it is not only us. As we can clearly see, based on the statements of my colleagues, visas are not being issued to a large number of national delegations. Our American colleagues should not boast about issuing 160 visas. All visas requested should be issued and not just out of simple goodwill but because there is a corresponding agreement in place. It is not just a desire on our part; it is our right.

Our experts are on equal footing with the experts of other member States. They are not tourists; they come here to work. The issue being addressed here is not Russian-American relations, but rather non-compliance by the United States with its obligations under the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. It is blatant disregard and non-compliance. It is malicious.

With regard to the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, I would note — so that my colleagues are not under the impression that we raised this issue only yesterday — that we have raised the issue of visas with the American side since 2004. Some of our colleagues may even be able to boast of an even longer history of discussing the issue, without achieving any real results. One element that causes particular concern for us is that, in essence, since the end of 2018, due to the visa policy implemented by the United States, we have been unable to fully take part in the disarmament segment of our work. The situation is completely unacceptable and I call on all colleagues present here to show solidarity with us.

Mr. Jiménez (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am pleased to see you, Mr. Ambassador, chairing the work of our Committee. We wish you every success. Rest assured that you have the support of our delegation.

We deplore the failure to comply with the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, as it pertains to the issuance of visas to representatives so as to ensure that delegations can participate in the work of the First Committee. We join countries in calling on the host country to reflect on efforts that can be made to find a solution so that we can begin the work of the First Committee. We express our solidarity with all countries that have been affected by such arbitrary measures.

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation has long faced visas problems and other restrictions imposed by the host country. So far, we have continued to inform the delegation of the United States, through various channels, of the problem and suggest that we find a way to resolve it. The last time we did so was yesterday, at the meeting of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. We discussed the issue in detail and informed the Committee of the problem but have not received a response from the United States delegation to date. It is unacceptable for the United States to impose restrictions on delegations arising from bilateral issues and agendas. We are the United Nations family and we expect the support of the United Nations on the issue.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): This is obviously not the way we had hoped to begin the work of the Committee. However, we understand the concerns of various delegations, as expressed here. We would like to begin our work and have discussed with members of the Bureau the adoption by consensus of our

programme of work, which has been circulated. As we informed members, we have taken the time to attempt to accommodate complex situations that have led us to difficulties in previous years. We would like to ensure that there is consensus when we come to adopt the programme of work.

I believe that, having heard from delegations, we need to take some time to conduct the necessary consultations so that the Bureau can engage with all actors concerned and with the various bodies of our Organization to determine whether or not an agreement can be reached on the issue. I understand that the situation goes beyond the work of the First Committee, although specific issues have been raised with regard to representatives who were or who should have been accredited to work in the Committee.

I ask that members allow us to make contact with the various delegations, the Secretariat and the President of the General Assembly as soon as possible. I do not believe that it would be useful for the Committee to proceed to adopt its programme of work if there is no consensus — or if we have not at least done the necessary work to try to achieve consensus.

Accordingly, in my capacity as Chair of the Committee, I will adjourn the meeting so that consultations can be conducted. We will let members know at the earliest opportunity what the next steps will be after discussing the issue with various delegations to try to reach an agreement. Again, we will inform members of the next steps through the proper channels.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.