

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SIXTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 21 August 2003, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Ms. Kuniko INOBUCHI (Japan)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 936th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished delegates, on Tuesday we learned with shock and dismay about the terrorist attack on the United Nations office in Baghdad. The deadliest attack in history on the Organization left at least 17 people dead, among them Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Iraq, and many people injured, both international staff members and Iraqis.

Such an unprovoked and murderous act of violence against the men and women who had gone to Iraq to help the Iraqi people recover their independence and sovereignty and rebuild their country should be resolutely condemned.

On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament, and on my own behalf, I would like to express our most heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathy to all the families who have lost loved ones.

I also propose that the Conference on Disarmament observe a minute of silence to honour Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello and all the other international staff members who gave their lives in the service of the international community.

A moment of silence was observed.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Carlos Antonio da Rocha Paranhos of Brazil.

Mr. da ROCHA PARANHOS (Brazil): Madam President, at the outset let me take the opportunity of my first statement to the Conference on Disarmament to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency. A great responsibility lies on your shoulders as President. You may count on our entire cooperation in helping you in your efforts to move our work forward. Allow me also to congratulate Ambassador Carlo Trezza and to thank him for the welcome which he addressed to me during our last plenary meeting. I also congratulate all your predecessors who presided over this body during the current session. Let me also thank my colleagues in the Conference for their spirit of cooperation and for the demonstrations of friendship that I have experienced since my recent arrival in Geneva.

I have requested the floor today to refer to the tragic death of Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Iraq and High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to express thanks for the various expressions of condolences that during the last two days have been addressed to me and to the members of my delegation.

Mr. da Rocha Paranhos, Brazil

In this context, I would like to read to you an official translation of the note issued by the Brazilian Government on the death of Sergio. It reads as follows:

“Shocked and with profound grief, the Brazilian Government was informed of the death of Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Iraq, as a result of a barbaric and insane terrorist act.

“Sergio Vieira de Mello accomplished the difficult missions with which he was entrusted in Cambodia, Bosnia and Kosovo, among others, with brilliance and professionalism. In East Timor, his role was fundamental, as Chief of the United Nations Interim Authority, in the reconstruction of the country and the consolidation of its institutions. He was an indefatigable defender of humanism, peace, law and multilateralism. He honoured the Brazilian citizenship and was a cause of pride for the entire nation.

“The President of the Republic announced an official period of mourning of three days and decided to award Sergio Vieira de Mello, as a posthumous mark of homage, the National Order of Merit in its highest degree. The President of the Republic has also made available the presidential plane for the transport of the remains of Sergio Vieira de Mello.

“The Brazilian Government, which is receiving countless messages of sorrow on the part of world leaders, expresses its condolences to the family of Sergio Vieira de Mello and shares the pain of all those who were close to this great Brazilian.”

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador da Rocha Paranhos for his statement.

Also on Tuesday we learned about a suicide bombing in Jerusalem which killed 20 Israelis and injured dozens more. On this sad occasion, I would like to extend our sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

Before we proceed to our business today, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Nagasaki Peace Messengers and the accompanying distinguished citizens of Nagasaki who are following our plenary meeting today. For several years now students from Nagasaki have been visiting the Geneva Branch of the Department for Disarmament Affairs to convey, on behalf of thousands of students from Nagasaki and Hiroshima, a message calling for nuclear disarmament. It is encouraging to see that the young generation is so devoted to the noble cause of arms control and disarmament and so interested in the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have the following speakers for today's plenary meeting: the first will be the distinguished delegate of Argentina and the second the distinguished delegate of South Africa.

Before giving them the floor, however, I should like to make some opening remarks as Japan assumes the presidency of the Conference.

(The President)

Allow me, at the outset, to express my sincere appreciation to my predecessors this year for having presided over the Conference in a most effective and efficient manner with their wisdom, admirable skills and untiring spirit. Special thanks go to Ambassador Carlo Trezza who has spared no effort to keep me informed of his ideas during his presidency so as to ensure consistency between successive presidents. It is my honour to continue in the efforts made by the distinguished ambassadors before me as I succeed to the presidency of this august body on disarmament. I would greatly appreciate it if all delegations and the secretariat would extend their cooperation, advice and assistance to me during Japan's presidency.

That said, the Conference still remains in a serious impasse despite cumulative efforts made by all presidents, distinguished ambassadors and member States. As the Conference prepares to conclude its seventh annual session since 1997 without a tangible outcome, priority should be accorded, among other things, to the resolution not to let 2004 be another blank year. Next year the Conference on Disarmament should be allowed to play a meaningful role in the promotion of international peace and security and to restore its relevance. I believe that this is the common aspiration of all States.

The most important task that I must undertake during my tenure is to explore the possibility of agreement on a programme of work that will allow the Conference to recommence its work. This effort must take into account all proposals and discussions held not only since the beginning of this year but since 1997. Various proposals have been put forward, and among them CD/1624 and CD/1693 enjoy the support of a great majority. Consequently, a consensus programme of work should be developed in line with these documents.

The submission by Ambassador Lint, on behalf of the five ambassadors, of a revision to CD/1693 in June was one more effort in the same direction. Encouraging moves, accepting this revised proposal, followed during the presidency of Ambassador Trezza. I have begun consultations with various delegations in order to determine whether these moves can be further developed into a more consolidated effort, leading to a breakthrough. I would also like to clarify real differences which still remain, or seem to remain, among States. I will continue to hold consultations on this matter and would ask for the cooperation of all delegations in this regard.

I would also like to touch upon the efforts made by my predecessors to pursue a so-called "out-of-the-box" approach, to stimulate the Conference's work in areas relevant to the current international security environment. This approach has been discussed in terms of identifying possible new issues on which the Conference can work productively. While the discussion held on this matter has been very thought-provoking, no consensus has yet emerged on what issues should be dealt with and how. Certainly, the work of the Conference on Disarmament should not be confined to the traditional issues already couched in the existing proposal on a programme of work, and I am open to any suggestions in this regard.

Possible ways of enhancing the contribution of civil society to the Conference's work have been discussed this year through the efforts made by successive presidents, notably Ambassador Whelan of Ireland and Ambassador Levi of Israel. I recognize the importance of this issue and the need for the Conference continuously to engage in related discussions to reach consensus.

(The President)

Since I will be presiding over the Conference during the concluding part of this annual session, part of my efforts will be devoted to drafting its report to the United Nations General Assembly. It is my sincere hope that this report will create an appropriate setting for the mounting of effective and efficient consultations during the intersessional period and at the beginning of next year's session, leading to the commencement of work at an early stage next year. I welcome any suggestions or comments put forward by delegations to facilitate the work of the presidency in this regard and to ensure that the report is meaningful.

In assuming the presidency, I renew my determination to give new impetus to multilateral disarmament and arms control, despite the different realities all countries are facing and their different interests and priorities. And at this point allow me to refer again, in particular, to the Peace Messengers from Nagasaki city who are with us today. They are high-school students visiting from Nagasaki, with the support of civil society, representing their generation's wish for peace. The residents of Nagasaki, as well as of Hiroshima, have a strong commitment to peace and disarmament, which they would like to share not only with the people of Japan but also with the rest of the international community. It is our duty to endeavour to resolve the current stalemate in the Conference so that we are able to relate to the rest of the world and to the generations to come how our political will and concerted efforts are able to make a profound difference in the security environment of mankind in the twenty-first century.

I should now like to give the floor to the distinguished representative of Argentina, Mr. Marcelo Valle Fonrouge.

Mr. VALLE FONROUGE (Argentina) (translated from Spanish): Madam President, as this is the first time that I have the honour of taking the floor since you assumed the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, allow me, at the outset, to express on behalf of my delegation our pleasure at seeing you preside over our work. We see in your dedication and evident enthusiasm a pledge of fruitful work ahead, which will be reflected in the efficient preparation of the annual report to the General Assembly of the United Nations and also in surmounting difficulties which will help generate new hope of reaching a consensus formula enabling us at an early date to start work on the substantive issues of this Conference. I assure you of the full support of our delegation in working with you in the performance of this task.

Madam President, allow me to join you and Ambassador Carlos Antonio Paranhos, distinguished representative of Brazil, in expressing our deepest sympathy and condolences to the family of Sergio Vieira de Mello, United Nations Special Representative to Iraq. On behalf of the people and Government of Argentina I wish to express our deep grief at this tragic event that caused loss of human lives and suffering to members both of the United Nations organization and other international organizations in Baghdad. We reiterate our deepest condemnation and utter repudiation of any form of terrorism.

(Mr. Valle Fonrouge, Argentina)

Madam President, as you are aware, the process of reviewing the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, as mandated by resolution 57/75, was completed on 1 August this year under the presidency of Argentina with a consensus decision in favour of extending the scope of weapons categories III and VII.

In category III, under large calibre artillery systems, the reporting threshold has been lowered from 100 to 75 millimetres, thus covering the 81 and 82 millimetre mortars used in recent conflicts, in particular in Africa.

Category VII (missiles and missile launchers) has been extended to include man-portable air defence systems in response to the technological advances in missile systems with a range below 25 kilometres.

Also in this category, there was discussion of the idea of reducing the calibre of munitions covered by this category to 35 millimetres. This led to an analysis of transparency measures relating to small arms and light weapons and appreciation was noted for the extensive efforts made in this area at the global, regional and subregional levels and approval expressed, in particular, for the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

In the Register's other categories, views were expressed regarding the technological changes that have taken place in arms systems. In weapons category I, relating to battle tanks, the current definition was considered sufficiently broad to cover the parallel trends in technology in this area towards, on the one hand, building heavier battle tanks equipped with larger calibre weapons and, on the other, producing lighter tanks, although with a weight not less than 16.5 tons.

Under category II (armoured combat vehicles) amendments to the definition were considered, taking into account reconnaissance and electronic warfare capacities, as well as other functions such as armoured rescue vehicles and light tanks.

Under category IV, (combat aircraft), discussions centred on technical adjustments, taking into account force multipliers, troop command posts and force projection measures, such as in-flight refuelling and aircraft design for the transport of troops and air-drop supply missions. The Group also considered whether the definition of this category covered military aircraft carrying out specialized electronic warfare missions, the destruction of ground-to-air defence posts and reconnaissance flights. The same aspects were also considered under category V.

Under category V (attack helicopters), as with category IV, the group considered the implications of technical adjustments, which could necessitate a change to the title of the category to take account of combat support systems such as, for example, target acquisition (including in anti-submarine warfare), communications, troop command posts, mine-laying or the transport of troops.

(Mr. Valle Fonrouge, Argentina)

In category VI (warships), discussions focused on the possibility of lowering the tonnage of surface craft from 750 to 400 tons; the implications of a possible reduction in tonnage to 150 tons, which would cover a wide range of vessels, in particular, mine-layers; lowering the tonnage of submarines to 50 tons; and stipulations relating to the range of missiles and torpedoes.

Where the operation of the Register was concerned, recommendations were adopted to the effect that efforts should continue to meet the needs of a large number of States and to respond to technological changes that had taken place in arms systems over the 10 years of the Register's operation, since its creation in 1992.

The Group stressed the importance of increasing the number of national reports that were submitted, in order to ensure that the Register remained up to date, and had at its disposal a reliable base for the comparison of data, so that trends over the intervening period could be analysed. States were invited to provide information on their procurement through national production and their existing military holdings.

Since the establishment of the Register, more than 166 Governments have submitted reports on international arms transfers. In 2000 and 2001, the number of reports submitted marked a considerable increase over all previous years. The highest level of participation was reached in 2001, when 126 Governments submitted reports. That year, 31 Governments submitted reports on their military holdings for that year and 29 Governments submitted reports on their procurement through national production.

Between 1999 and 2001 overall participation by Latin American and Caribbean countries rose to 79 per cent of all States of the region

Countries were encouraged to designate a national point of contact for communication between capitals and the secretariat, thereby facilitating the submission of information to the Register, and the national point of contact would also be responsible for questions relating to possible discrepancies which might emerge in the data provided in the submissions by exporting and importing States. To date, 82 Governments have provided information to the secretariat on their national points of contact.

The work conducted during these meetings was considered to have been successful, thanks to agreements which made possible the consensus adoption of a transparent report containing important recommendations for the further development of the Register, the inclusion of adjustments to categories III and VII, measures to ensure transparency by gathering fuller information on national production and providing for the submission of information by States on small arms and light weapons.

Without the cooperation and flexibility demonstrated by the delegations participating in the process, it would not have been possible to achieve these results.

The importance of the Register has once again been reaffirmed. As a confidence-building measure, it has enabled many Governments to develop and simplify their

(Mr. Valle Fonrouge, Argentina)

national systems for monitoring and controlling arms transfers. At the same time, there has been renewed recognition of the contribution made by the Register to the reduction of tension, the promotion of international and regional peace and security and the limiting of military production and arms transfers, taking due account of countries' legitimate security needs.

To conclude this brief summary, I would like to convey our gratitude to the delegation of the Netherlands for its support for the Register through the resolution on arms transfers which it sponsored and which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its last session.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of Argentina for his statement. I now invite the distinguished representative of South Africa, Mr. Peter Goosen, to take the floor.

Mr. GOOSEN (South Africa): Madam President, at the outset, may I take this opportunity to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. In the spirit of the good cooperation and friendship that exists between Japan and South Africa, please accept my assurances of our full cooperation and support for your efforts successfully to guide us through this important final phase of the 2003 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

May I also extend our appreciation for the valuable efforts of Ambassador Carlo Trezza, during Italy's tenure as President of the Conference on Disarmament, that have resulted in the narrowing of differences on the programme of work.

In a statement released on 19 August 2003 by the South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the reaction of the South African Government to the tragic event that took place in Baghdad was conveyed as follows:

"The South African Government expressed its outrage at the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on Tuesday, 19 August 2003, in which many have been reported to have lost their lives and scores have been injured.

"We are deeply shocked by this senseless act of terror, directed at the Organization, which is, above all else, dedicated to promoting peace and security in a non-partisan manner.

"The sanctity of the United Nations, its officials and its offices is respected even in the harshest conflict situations. To direct an attack against the United Nations is to combat the collective efforts of the international community aimed at promoting peace and improving the living conditions of the most unfortunate. It is deeply disturbing that lives have been lost, including the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to Iraq, and also that many representatives of the United Nations are among the injured.

(Mr. Goosen, South Africa)

“The South Africa Government has expressed its deep concern at the continuing instability in Iraq. We have built our hopes for a better future for Iraq and its people on the efforts of the very organization that has been targeted in this instance.

“While offering condolences to the United Nations, families of the victims and wishing the injured a speedy recovery, the South African Government urgently calls on all forces in Iraq to cooperate with the efforts of the United Nations, representing the entire community of nations.

“It is utterly senseless to attack those whose mandate it is to work with the people of Iraq in all their diversity to launch a legitimate political process which is designed to lead to the establishment of a freely elected, representative Government in Iraq and to act as the guarantor of that process.

“Finally, the South African Government reiterates its support for the extremely important functions carried out by the United Nations and its personnel in Iraq. It calls on the United Nations not to be discouraged by this setback but to persevere with its task with strengthened resolve.”

Madam President, your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament comes at a critical juncture, where we stand on the threshold of bridging the divide that has for so long frustrated the adoption of a programme of work.

Successive efforts in the recent past to build a bridge that would cross the divide have culminated in the proposal of the five ambassadors, as contained in document CD/1693 and as amended by Ambassador Jean Lint of Belgium on 26 June 2003, on behalf of the five ambassadors.

China and the Russian Federation, among others, have recently shown flexibility by indicating that, although the suggested amendments still fall short of their respective positions, they are nonetheless in a position to join the consensus on the five ambassadors' initiative on the programme of work as amended on 26 June 2003.

Ambassador Carlo Trezza, on 14 August 2003, in his closing remarks as the President of the Conference, expressed the view that, despite the difficulties being experienced in adopting a programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament, it is important that delegations present their views.

In response to this appeal and against the background of the recent important developments in the Conference on Disarmament, we wish to place on record the position of South Africa in this regard and to use this opportunity to commend China and the Russian Federation for the flexibility and constructive approach that they have adopted.

(Mr. Goosen, South Africa)

South Africa continues to believe that the international community's endeavours to tackle non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control issues remain in difficulty. Lack of political will and narrow self-interest continues to prevent the international community from substantively addressing these issues.

It is South Africa's belief that, as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community which has the primary role in substantive negotiations on priority questions of disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament has a special responsibility to break the impasse and lead the international community out of this situation, which is preventing substantive work being undertaken on non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control issues.

For many years the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to agree on a programme of work, mainly because of differences regarding negotiating mandates. Successive efforts have narrowed the differences and the latest proposal of the five ambassadors, as amended, has clear, overwhelming support.

Many delegations, including my own, would want to see the proposal improved in some areas and strengthened in other areas. South Africa, for example, remains uncomfortable with the mandate of the proposed ad hoc committee on so-called negative security assurances.

That said, although the five Ambassadors' proposal for a programme of work clearly does not fully satisfy all delegations, it represents a delicate compromise that should be supported. South Africa therefore believes that this latest proposal presents the Conference on Disarmament with the most realistic proposal for its programme of work and South Africa will join a consensus on its adoption.

In this context, my delegation naturally also fully supports the views conveyed by Brazil on behalf of the Group of 21 at the presidential consultations held on 20 August 2003.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of South Africa for his statement.

This concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see the Netherlands. The distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands has the floor.

Mr. SANDERS (Netherlands): First of all, Madam President, let me tell you how happy my delegation is to see you in the chair. I would like to express our full confidence in your capability to promote our work and, I hope, to get closer to the breakthrough which we are waiting for. I pledge my full support to the efforts which you, I am sure, are going to make.

Allow me also to associate myself with the condolences that were expressed by the previous speakers and my deep sympathy with the victims of the brutal attack on the United Nations premises in Baghdad.

(Mr. Sanders, Netherlands)

My second point is to welcome very much the statement just made by my distinguished Argentinian colleague. As all of you in the room know, the United Nations Register is something that the Netherlands has always actively promoted, and I wish to express my deep appreciation to Argentina for chairing the Group of Experts in a most effective way. We strongly welcome the successful expansion of the scope of the Register. It demonstrates that the Register is alive and kicking and adapting, and capable of adapting, itself to changing circumstances, which is extremely important.

My third point, and really the main reason why I asked for the floor, is to repeat an announcement that has already been sent to all members of the Conference and to all observers about another meeting in the context of our open-ended educational and informative exercise on FMCT. The issue that we hope to address is the non-weapons use of fissile material, primarily naval propulsion. The meeting will be held on Friday, 26 September 2003, from 3 to 6 p.m. in room XI of the Palais.

We have two distinguished speakers. The first is Dr. Marvin Miller, Research Affiliate of the Centre for International Studies, Department of Nuclear Engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the second - even more well-known to you, I trust - is Dr. Tariq Rauf.

I hope to be able to welcome you, all of you, I might say, at this meeting, which is of the seminar type, and I hope it will be fruitful.

Finally, now that I have the floor, I wish to place on record that the Netherlands can support and accept the five ambassadors' proposal as amended by my dear colleague, Ambassador Lint, on 26 June 2003.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished Ambassador of the Netherlands for his statement and for the kind words addressed to me by him and by previous speakers.

Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this point? That does not seem to be the case.

On procedural matters, with regard to the timetable of meetings for the next week, I would like to recall that, in accordance with paragraph 4 of the decision on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament, contained in document CD/1036, the Conference shall hold two plenary meetings next week.

At this stage, however, there are no speakers for next week. If I do not hear any views to the contrary, I would therefore propose that the Conference hold only one plenary meeting next week, on Thursday, 28 August 2003.

It was so decided.

As you are aware, we have less than four weeks until the end of the 2003 session, part of which will be devoted to the consideration of the annual report to the General Assembly. Rule 44 of the Conference rules of procedure provides that the draft annual report shall be made

(The President)

available to all members of the Conference at least two weeks before the scheduled date of its adoption. With the assistance of the secretariat, I am currently preparing the draft report, which, in accordance with rule 45 of the rules of procedure, will be factual. The draft report will be available in all official languages in delegation boxes next week on Tuesday, 26 August 2003. It is therefore my intention to conduct the first reading of the draft report at an informal meeting following the plenary meeting on Thursday, 28 August 2003.

This concludes our business for today.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 28 August 2003, at 10 a.m. and, as just announced, it will be followed by an informal plenary meeting devoted to the first reading of the draft report of the Conference.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.