

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND NINETY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 3 March 2008, at 4.05 p.m.

President: Mr. Ahmet ÜZÜMCÜ (Turkey)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1095th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Today we will begin a series of plenary meetings during which the Conference will be addressed by a number of dignitaries from member States. It is indeed a source of pride and great satisfaction for the Conference on Disarmament to have so many distinguished political figures addressing this body. Their presence testifies to the abiding commitment of their governments to our joint efforts, as well as the continuing importance they attach to our forum. It is our sincere hope that the wisdom, political vision and words of encouragement of our distinguished guests during this week will give a new impetus to our efforts aimed at launching the substantive work of the Conference.

On behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I would like to extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Taiana, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Argentina, who will be our speaker today. Excellency, you have the floor.

Mr. TAIANA (Argentina) (spoke in Spanish): It is a pleasure for me to be with you this afternoon and to be able to share with the representatives in the sole multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations a number of thoughts concerning the tasks of this important body, to which my country has always attached the utmost importance.

The walls of this chamber still ring with countless negotiations on peace and international security. They also bear the marks of significant milestones in multilateral disarmament diplomacy, some of them not so distant, such as the Convention on Chemical Weapons or the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Nobody is unaware that over the last 10 years the Conference has not been able to address the specific task which gives it its *raison d'être*: the negotiation of legally binding disarmament agreements. However, the threats and challenges to peace exist and continue, just as there are urgent matters on which this Conference should begin substantive work without delay.

We have noted with moderate optimism the procedural efforts which have been made to at least make a start on the substantive consideration of a number of items on the international disarmament agenda. This insipient manifestation of good will and flexibility should logically be followed by more significant steps - specifically by the start of negotiations.

A few weeks ago, the United Nations Secretary-General from this same rostrum warned of the clear possibility that the Conference on Disarmament might continue this slow drift towards marginalization which would benefit no one and which in the final analysis would deprive the international community of the benefits of a world with fewer weapons.

I would first mention the issue of the treaty on halting the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices. We firmly believe that the ground has been prepared and the conditions are ripe for moving forward towards a verifiable, international ban on the

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production of material intended to boost nuclear arsenals. This is clear to us, particularly when it is the manifest will of all parties, including the nuclear Powers, to work towards their reduction at the bilateral level.

A few weeks ago, the delegations of the Latin American and Caribbean States which are members and observers in the Conference on Disarmament made it clear in a joint statement addressed to this Conference that for our region nuclear disarmament continues to be a matter of the highest priority. As you are aware, our countries have given tangible proof of their conviction in this respect through the Treaty of Tlatelolco and other regional agreements and commitments.

Argentina is a country firmly committed to nuclear disarmament. This is for reasons of principle and conviction and because as a country which produces and consumes nuclear energy and materials, we believe that we bear a special responsibility. That is the path which we have embarked on together with Brazil, with which we have pursued a path of cooperation and transparency for many years. A few days ago, in Buenos Aires, Presidents Cristina Kirchner and Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva signed a series of agreements for cooperation and integration in the nuclear field, including areas such as the development of power reactors and uranium enrichment, which offer tangible evidence of this resolve to continue to work together to meet the energy needs of our countries and our region, and to do so in an open manner with the necessary safeguards with respect to the exclusively peaceful use of nuclear technologies.

Regional activities, however important and commendable they may be, cannot take the place of those of a universal nature in terms of scope and impact, and here we all bear a special responsibility. The member States of the Non-Proliferation Treaty are aware that compliance with the obligations in the Treaty makes such progress essential. Formal commitments have been made to boost them, and these must be fulfilled, not reinterpreted in the light of a reality which by its very nature is constantly in flux.

The nuclear Powers must play a clear leading role in this respect. It is they who possess nuclear weapons, and consequently it is they who must live up to the solemn undertakings which feature prominently in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and in many subsequent agreements. Double talk cannot be sustained in this field. One cannot preach the benefits of non-proliferation and continue to develop more sophisticated nuclear weapons, delay the destruction of existing stockpiles and prevent the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We believe that the time has come to lend clear political support at the highest possible level so that the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons becomes a reality. To begin with, this Conference has its own responsibility and we member States must support meaningful negotiations. For this reason, I wanted to join you this morning, and consequently I welcome the fact that other high-level officials are coming to the Conference on Disarmament to say clearly that what is done or not done here counts, and that in our capitals we are monitoring this closely.

There are other issues, such as the prohibition of an arms race in outer space, which have focused the attention of delegations. Significant initiatives have been presented, and there is no doubt that these should be considered in an appropriate and constructive way. We noted with interest the ideas which the Russian Federation and China have presented on the demilitarization

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of outer space. Perhaps the time has come to give the ad hoc committee on prevention of an arms race in outer space an exploratory mandate to conduct a systematic and technical assessment of the best approach to this complex matter.

At the same time, we do not agree with the policy of postponing negotiations which are ripe for commencement, as with the convention on fissile material, on the grounds that other issues also need to be negotiated simultaneously.

While we understand the concern and the priority which a number of States attach to a specific topic, we must state that for Argentina the time has come to negotiate, not to negotiate on negotiations. The Conference has spent 10 years doing that, making any further comment unnecessary. It is not by holding back progress on one topic that this Conference has made its most useful contributions in the past. Had that been the case, the Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear tests would never have seen the light of day. Neither would we have the Convention on Chemical Weapons, thanks to which steady progress is being made in destroying enormous stockpiles of chemical weapons.

That is why I would venture to urge this body, on behalf of my Government, to embark without delay on the path which can lead us to the prohibition of the production of fissile material for weapons. The Conference has appropriate guidance in the form of a draft mandate for a negotiating body. We have the technical experience and this forum to do it. The eyes of the international community are on this Conference. We must not let this opportunity slip.

Argentina has attached special priority and attention to progress in the field of conventional weapons. We have given firm and active support to the development of transparency and confidence-building measures in our region and internationally. A few days ago in New York experts began work to assess the possibility and the characteristics of an international agreement on the arms trade. We hope that after the successful creation and establishment of the first United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, it will now be possible to take a further step towards codifying the arms trade so as to provide the United Nations with instruments which can help to prevent excessive or destabilizing flows or disregard of the guidelines laid down by the Security Council.

Two days ago we commemorated the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, an instrument which, incidentally, had to be negotiated outside the framework of the United Nations. For Argentina that Convention is of special importance, since we have used it as a framework for efforts to clear part of our territory, the Islas Malvinas. Despite the continuing dispute over sovereignty with the United Kingdom, we have worked jointly and constructively to fulfil the obligations stemming from the Convention, overcoming considerable technical and political difficulties.

It is customary to listen to elegant appeals for compliance with international non-proliferation standards. Argentina shares that concern and is making a tangible commitment at all levels. However, we must remember that the international system of non-proliferation is based on extremely fragile political balances, which must be preserved and protected. The

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Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference which will take place in 2010 will doubtless provide an excellent opportunity to assess to what degree we have shouldered and fully discharged the commitments under the NPT. This Conference has a clear role to play in that process.

Somebody said once that the Conference on Disarmament could be compared to a mythical monster which, after giving birth to a disarmament agreement, enters a lengthy period of hibernation. This lethargy sometimes persists for 5 or 10 years, perhaps more. Statistics would seem to confirm that comparison. If there is some truth in those words, it is going to be time to prepare for a reawakening of the Conference on Disarmament, which should not be delayed.

The PRESIDENT: We thank you, Mr. Minister, for your comprehensive statement, which covered several aspects of the arms control and disarmament efforts in the international arena. Your statement has also demonstrated once again the clear support of the Argentine Government for the work which takes place here in this chamber.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a couple of minutes so that I can escort His Excellency the Minister out of the chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 4.20 p.m. and resumed at 4.25 p.m.

The PRESIDENT: The plenary meeting is resumed. I have no more speakers on my list. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case.

This concludes our business for today. As indicated, the next formal plenary meeting of the Conference will be held tomorrow, Tuesday, 4 March. In light of the heavy schedule tomorrow morning, I once again appeal to delegations to be present in time to enable the meeting to start at 10 o'clock sharp.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.