



General Assembly

Seventy-eighth session

First Committee

24th meeting

Thursday, 26 October 2023, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

Chair: Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania)

In the absence of the Chair, Mr. Eustathiou de los Santos (Uruguay), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

Agenda items 90 to 106 (continued)

Thematic discussion on specific subjects and introduction and consideration of draft resolutions and decisions submitted on all disarmament and international security agenda items

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to warmly welcome to the rostrum our panellists here today, the President of the Conference on Disarmament, Her Excellency Ambassador Margit Szűcs of Hungary; the Chair of the Disarmament Commission, His Excellency Ambassador Akan Rakhmetullin of Kazakhstan; and the Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Mr. Robin Geiss.

Also participating in our panel today is the Chair of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, Her Excellency Ambassador Elissa Golberg of Canada, who will be briefing the Committee through a pre-recorded video.

In accordance with the programme of work, the Committee will first hear a briefing by our panellists. Following the briefing, the Committee will change to an informal mode to engage in a question-and-answer session. Thereafter, the Committee will continue its thematic discussion under the cluster “Disarmament machinery”.

The Committee will now hear a briefing by the President of the Conference on Disarmament, Her Excellency Ambassador Margit Szűcs of Hungary.

I now give the floor to Ms. Szűcs.

Ms. Szűcs (Hungary) President, Conference on Disarmament: It is really a privilege and a pleasure for me to be here today as the Permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations and the World Trade Organization in Geneva in my capacity as the last presidency and the last President of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in the 2023 session. I was told that I have to be very brief, so I will try to do so.

I would like to give a little bit of an overview of the work of the Conference in its 2023 session and a couple of personal takeaways that I gathered in my presidency and while drafting the report of the Conference (A/C.1/78/L.58).

As members are probably all aware, the Conference did manage this year to agree to a consensus report, which was thanks to the flexibility and the cooperation of the members of the Conference on Disarmament, for which I would like to express my appreciation. Also, afterwards, we negotiated with the full membership of the General Assembly draft resolution A/C.1/78/L.58, which is hopefully to be adopted next week.

I would like to focus on three main topics in my briefing. The first is the mandate of the Conference and what we have done in that regard. The second is about inclusivity in the work of the Conference and the importance of multilateralism in its work. And the third is on the effective functioning of the CD.

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As members all know, there are six presidencies every year in the CD, and Hungary was the last one. Therefore, it was our duty and job to draft the final report, but I would like to acknowledge the work of the first five presidencies, which were held by Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France and Germany, because they made a tremendous effort and did a tremendous job so that we could have a meaningful session in 2023.

Therefore, the first issue is whether the Conference fulfilled its mandate or not. The Conference is mandated to negotiate, and, sadly, that has not been the case for a while, and that was not the case this year either. However, despite not fulfilling its function or its mandate, we did have very substantial deliberations. Altogether we had more than 60 meetings — formal and informal sessions — 50 formal and 14 informal sessions — in which we covered all the seven agenda items that are on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. We had substantial discussions on issues pertaining to very relevant issues with regard to security, such as artificial intelligence (AI) in the military domain and the responsible use and development of AI and the prevention of arms race in outer space. We talked about the New Agenda for Peace and the disarmament aspects of that. With regard to transparency in armaments, we discussed nuclear verification and the transparency of nuclear doctrines and nuclear arsenals. In informal sessions, we touched upon the role of gender in disarmament in the context of the women and peace and security agenda and the participation of young people in the work of the Conference. We also discussed at length something that relates to the third topic that I would like to briefly mention, which is the revitalization of the Conference. But we also discussed issues such as negative security assurances, a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons (FMCT) or other nuclear explosive devices and possible negotiations and the nuclear-weapon-free zones. Those were topics, and members will be able to see them in the report, which has been published on the website.

We had lengthy discussions under the Egyptian presidency on the programme of work and on the issue of observers. And that brings me to my second point, which is the inclusivity issue. Members will see also in the report and in the draft resolution on the work of the CD that, unfortunately, this year was marked by a lack of decision on the observer issue, so there were no observers in the Conference. Of course, that

is something that we need to reflect on more because that has created some uncertainty with regard to the observers, as there was no such decision. Inclusivity and multilateralism are key if we want to work effectively in the CD.

The effective functioning of the Conference is the third item I would like to mention. We had, with the able support of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, under the French and German presidencies, a retreat which was not strictly under the CD agenda, but it was a very useful thought process based on which there were several informal discussions on how to revitalize the work of the Conference on Disarmament and what we could do in the short term, medium term and long term to make the CD a little bit more effective and efficient when it comes to future sessions.

It is no secret that, under each of those three topics, the topics that were discussed, the geopolitical divisions and difficulties were surfacing with regard to the inclusivity issue, as well as with regard to the issues of revitalization and effective functioning, but they were very interesting discussions.

If we need to summarize the main takeaways, one of my main takeaways is that this session, even though those geopolitical divisions were present and felt, provided a very useful and multilateral forum in which to discuss those issues. And those issues — as I mentioned, negative security assurances, nuclear-weapon-free zones, FMCT, nuclear transparency, nuclear verification and so on — are issues of vital security interest, and there are less and less forums in which we can discuss them. The CD is a very important multilateral forum in which to, even with small steps, build that trust and be able to discuss those issues.

The second personal take away is the importance of inclusivity and how important it is to have a very clear picture when it comes to the issue of participation in the work of the Conference for the membership of the General Assembly. That is something that we will need to reflect on in the future, building on the experiences of this year. In the draft resolution there is a very clear mandate that calls upon the CD to reflect on that issue and make efforts to ensure inclusivity.

The third take away is that this revitalization discussion that we started on the effective functioning of the Conference — a subject also discussed at length at the retreat and in the subsequent discussions — is something that the CD can build on and work with in

the long term, and it could provide a long-term benefit in addressing those issues — taking up those that can be taken up in the short term, in the medium term and even in the long term. Of course, one of the big challenges is the reopening of the rules of procedure, which is very difficult.

Finally, with regard to disarmament, this cluster is on the disarmament machinery, and the machinery only works if all the parts are working. I would therefore like to also call for an even more enhanced and better synergy when it comes to the work of the different elements of this disarmament machinery, of which the CD is one element. But of course, there is also the work of the First Committee and the Disarmament Commission. I think that we need to make more efforts to work more in tandem, to have more information exchanges and to work together in a more synergistic manner so that we can reap the benefits of that cooperation.

I would like to again thank my fellow colleagues from Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France and Germany for their work and the entire Committee for its efforts when it came to the drafting of the resolution, which Hungary as the penholder and the most recent President of the CD was coordinating. I would like to thank everyone for this year's work. Hungary is very pleased and privileged to have been able to do this work, which would not have been possible without the Committee's flexibility and support, for which I am grateful.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Chair of the Disarmament Commission, His Excellency Ambassador Akan Rakhmetullin of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Rakhmetullin (Kazakhstan), Chair, Disarmament Commission: I am honoured to present to the First Committee my vision and information about the discourse of the 2023 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. The Disarmament Commission works in two Working Groups. The first one is devoted to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and the second one is devoted to promoting transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space.

Regretfully, I have to state that the overall discussions were overshadowed by the latest geopolitical developments, tensions, controversies and contradictions, which set the tone for the overall discussions. In any event, we can say that the work

of the Commission was rather more successful than unsuccessful.

The report of the Commission is as follows. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/90, the Disarmament Commission convened for its 2023 session from 3 to 20 April. The session concluded successfully with the report submitted to the General Assembly at its current session (A/78/42), which includes substantive recommendations on one agenda item mandated to the Commission. Throughout the substantive session, the Commission held six plenary meetings, four of which were dedicated to a general exchange of views, and it heard statements from 77 delegations.

With regard to Working Group I of the Disarmament Commission, on 20 April 2023 our colleague, Mr. Kurt Davis of the Permanent Mission of Jamaica, was elected Chair of Working Group I, which is tasked with considering the recommendations on achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Mr. Davis had previous experience in that position, having served as Chair of Working Group I for the 2022 session as well. Working Group I held 10 meetings from 5 to 20 April. It started its work with the consideration of a conference room paper submitted by the Chair at the end of the 2022 session. During the course of two meetings, the paper was further revised three times, taking into account various views expressed by Member States.

Despite the best efforts by the Chair of the Group, many States held on to their national position positions and showed little flexibility or willingness to make concessions or to find middle ground in order to achieve compromise. The division between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States seemed as deep as ever. States were particularly divided on such issues as nuclear risk reduction, references to States not party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) that possess nuclear weapons and the Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

At the final meeting on 20 April, the Chair concluded that there was no consensus on his paper, owing to the divergent views that persisted on many critical issues. The failure to achieve consensus on the recommendations on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation again this year meant that the Disarmament Commission has been unable to achieve

consensus on that agenda item for the fifth consecutive cycle since the Commission first adopted it in 2006.

While the Chair made progress on narrowing gaps on a few contentious issues through several iterations of his initial papers, the failure over multiple consecutive cycles would compel us to reconsider the merits of having the Commission address the same agenda item for the forthcoming cycle, even if the agenda item was agreed after years of painstaking negotiation within our Commission.

I will now say a few words about Working Group II. Ms. Szilvia Balázs of Hungary was also re-elected in April 2023 as Chair of Working Group II, and she was tasked with the preparation of recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space, with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space, in accordance with the recommendations set out in the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities (A/68/189). Ms. Balázs has also served as Chair of Working Group II, so both Chairs had had prior experience of chairing the same group on the same topic the previous year.

Working Group II held nine meetings from 4 to 20 April. The Working Group heard statements by the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and the Chair of the Open-ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/231, of December 2021. Working Group II discussed the provisions contained in sections 4 to 8 of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts. The Chair prepared the conference room paper, which was subsequently discussed and revised four times. The Working Group was able to bring its deliberations to a successful conclusion on recommendations to promote the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities, with the goal of preventing an arms race in outer space, in accordance with the recommendations set out in the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures in Outer Space Activities.

As part of my report, I would like to make some personal observations.

First, on behalf of all delegations, I would like to register my deep appreciation to all who have supported us in conducting the Disarmament Commission. Secondly, I would like to share some observations about where we are and where we need to go. I am deeply thankful to both Mr. Kurt Davis and Ms. Szilvia Balázs. Unfortunately, they are not present; they all left New York for further work. I thank them for their hard work and untiring stewardship and dedication to the process. Their competence, understanding and inclusive approach to incorporate the vast range of perspectives were well acknowledged by all delegations. We are also indebted to the Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA) for its invaluable support and able guidance to the Chair and all the delegations. I warmly commend the devoted staff of the ODA, especially Mr. Tsutomu Kono, Mr. René Holbach, Mr. Hideki Matsuno, Mr. Michael Spies and other hard-working colleagues, and, of course, the staff of the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, represented by Ms. Sonia Elliott, Mr. Alexander Lomaia, Ms. Katya Widyatmoko, Ms. Lidija Komatina and many other colleagues who serve the Commission.

I would now like to make some general comments on the overall work of the Commission.

On the recent deliberations of the Commission, we could see that behind the manifestation of the serious challenges to international peace and security lies a serious lack of trust, which we must overcome with confidence-building measures, intensive good faith and inclusive diplomacy. We must halt the expansion of nuclear weapons, which are used as threats or tools of coercion, as well as increasing military budgets, expanded doctrines, growing stockpiles and the rapidly intensifying danger of military competition. We must also prevent the militarization of outer space at all costs. In the light of the growing security challenges in outer space, the recommendation of Working Group II represents an important contribution to strengthening the application of transparency and confidence-building measures. I sincerely hope that all States will consider implementing them going forward.

We are aware both of the great benefits of artificial intelligence and of its potential for abuse or harm. We must therefore realize the importance of ensuring its responsible development and deployment in the military domain with regard to propelling nuclear arsenals, as well as its use in outer space with

satellites. Those dimensions could be considered in our future deliberations.

I also call for the integration of a gender perspective into the work of the Commission. Women and girls should be at the heart of our disarmament policies, which contribute to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the related Beijing+25 process. In addition, civil society also provides very valuable advice and ideas that can spur the international community to action. Non-governmental organizations have proved beyond a doubt that they are dynamic partners as triggers of innovative synergies and new paradigm shifts. Our young people are the pillars of tomorrow and must be engaged at every step.

Finally, the Commission reflects the Organization's belief that disarmament and non-proliferation remain indispensable tools for creating a secure environment, which is a prerequisite for human development, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Chair of the Disarmament Commission for his statement.

The Committee will now view a pre-recorded video statement by Ambassador Elissa Golberg of Canada, Chair of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.

A pre-recorded video statement was shown in the conference room.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): The Committee will now hear a briefing by the Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Mr. Robin Geiss.

I now give the floor to Mr. Geiss.

Mr. Geiss (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research): I would like to request that our slides please be played.

I thank representatives very much for the opportunity to report to the First Committee here today and to provide an overview of the many activities of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in 2023 and its research plans and priorities for the coming year 2024.

The twenty-first century is marked by a cascading crisis and complex security dilemmas. And as a

result, the work of UNIDIR is in high and, I can say, growing demand.

UNIDIR provides independent and evidence-based research on some of the world's most pressing security challenges. The Institute builds knowledge and capacity on security and disarmament matters globally. It supports international treaty regimes and the informed engagement of all Member States in multilateral arms control and disarmament processes and efforts.

The Institute's current research agenda, as endorsed by its Board of Trustees, aims to identify pathways to reinvigorate multilateral arms control and disarmament in the face of an ever-more challenging, fraught international political and security environment.

Let me say from the outset, and it really goes without saying, UNIDIR, of course, stands ready to continue actively supporting all delegations, all Member States and the United Nations in all multilateral efforts in disarming, controlling arms, preventing proliferation and building a more secure world for all.

UNIDIR depends almost entirely on voluntary funding, and UNIDIR is able to make an impact owing only to the generous contributions from all Member States. I thank them very much for their generous support and trust in UNIDIR.

The flags that delegations can see on the slide represent the donors that have contributed over the past two years from 2021 to 2023. And once again, I am delighted to report to Member States the growing diversity of our donors. In 2023, we have already received contributions or commitments from 34 donors, and that includes donors from all continents and all permanent five countries. And we are, with that, on track to once again break our own record in terms of donor numbers and reach the highest number of donors in the Institute's history by the end of this year.

UNIDIR received a modest subvention increase of approximately \$400,000 in 2022, and let me say it is most grateful for that contribution. However, in spite of it, the Institute continues to rely more than 90 per cent on voluntary contributions. That means, out of the 66 positions held by people working for UNIDIR currently, only 2 positions are funded from the regular budget. And what is more, despite recurrent appeals by the General Assembly, our Board of Trustees and enormous institutional efforts, our unearmarked contributions are in continuous decline. Taken together,

those two trends continue to pose considerable financial risk to the Institute.

Against that backdrop, allow me to give a big shout out to those donors that have demonstrated their trust in UNIDIR by already contributing or committing to make unearmarked core contributions in 2023. In 2023, so far, we have unearmarked contributions received or committed from 11 donors, and those are Finland, Hungary, Iraq, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Türkiye.

Let me also say that, for many of our donors, our official development assistance (ODA) coefficient is an increasingly important standard set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). UNIDIR'S coefficient was determined for the first time in 2019, and it was set at 27 per cent eligibility. As we are only able to request a review of the standard once every five years, we are now actively working with the OECD. And with sincere thanks to Canada for sponsoring our application, we are working with the OECD to review our ODA eligibility coefficient for 2024 onwards. We at UNIDIR certainly feel that there is room to bring up that percentage of currently 27 per cent.

Owing to the increased demand for UNIDIR's workers, demonstrated in the vast number of activities that members will see all year-round and that UNIDIR is engaged in at the global, the regional and the national levels, the Institute's total revenue has been on a clear upward trajectory for the past five years. This year our income is projected to be almost four times that of 2018. But as the two bottom lines of the graph also indicate, the growth of UNIDIR's regular budget funds and unearmarked funds has been rather flat, and in fact the unearmarked funds have been declining. In the light of growing demand on the one hand, and declining unearmarked funding on the other, the regular budget funds are the only source of stable funding that can be used to address institutional priorities. Against that backdrop, and as the Chair of UNIDIR's Board of Trustees has also said, UNIDIR plans to reach out for the First Committee's support for a regular budget increase at the next available opportunity.

As the next slide shows, UNIDIR's ability as a research institute to attract and retain high quality and diverse research expertise from all around the world is key to its mission. The credibility and impact of its work depend on the quality and diversity of our researchers. UNIDIR currently has 66 full-time

positions. The personnel are from 24 countries, and 58 per cent of them are women, while 91 per cent of our staff hold either a master's or a Ph.D. degree, as one would expect in a research institute. Altogether they speak more than 20 languages, and 67 per cent of them are under the age of 40. We continue to follow the Secretary-General's 2018 recommendations regarding a flexible and scalable staffing model, whereby some key institutional staff at UNIDIR — 12 in total — are on United Nations contracts for access to Umoja and for carrying out supervisory roles. The majority of the members of UNIDIR's staff are on individual contractor agreements with the United Nations Office for Project Services.

The next slide illustrates the fact that UNIDIR is the only United Nations think tank working on the increasingly broad and complex spectrum of disarmament, arms-control and non-proliferation issues. In resolution 75/82, the General Assembly recognizes the importance, timeliness and high quality of the Institute's work. The breadth of its expertise is reflected in its five core research programmes, which lie at the heart of the Institute and are here to stay. The five programmes are on weapons of mass destruction, conventional arms and ammunition, security and technology, gender and disarmament and the newly established programme on space security. The five programmes really make up the engine room of the Institute as a whole. All of UNIDIR's research programmes are designed as multi-year scalable workstreams that enable it to dynamically reflect the disarmament priorities of a diverse international community.

The next slide shows that in addition to the five core research programmes we are currently undertaking two special research projects. One is related to managing exits from armed conflict and to the reasons why people join or leave armed groups. As many members know, the other programme focuses on the issue of a zone in the Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction. I am delighted to say that we have received renewed funding for that from the European Union and that the project has entered its second phase. In today's hyper-dynamic global security environment, it may well be that we will add additional projects in coming years, as new research needs arise.

Given the 10 minutes that I have for this presentation, it will be impossible to go into the details of our comprehensive research work programmes across

the full spectrum of disarmament and arms control, but let me say that for members who may be interested, we would of course be delighted to share further details about any of our programmes and projects. I will now briefly lay out some of the areas that our work is currently focused on, which clearly include nuclear weapons and conventional weapons. As shown on this slide, artificial intelligence (AI) is an area that we are investing in significantly and stepping up our focus on as demands increase. Other areas include gender and global security, cybersecurity and chemical and biological weapons.

Furthermore — as was mentioned earlier in terms of focus areas for our current ongoing research on conflict prevention, peacebuilding, missiles, drones, disarmament forums and the disarmament machinery — this summer, with the support of Germany and France, we held a retreat on the Conference on Disarmament and previous reform proposals. We focused on space security, science and technology and interconnected global risks. In addition to those research areas, dialogue activities are at the core of UNIDIR's mission. As an autonomous institution within the United Nations, UNIDIR can perform a critical bridge-building function in a fraught global security environment, and we regularly organize regional workshops and multi-stakeholder seminars of all shapes and sizes and on a variety of disarmament and security issues all year round. In addition, we convene three major flagship events on an annual basis — the innovations dialogue, which this year focused on military AI, the space security conference and the cyberstability conference.

In addition, as many are aware, we provide advice in various forms throughout the year. We provide support and expertise, including to the Conference on Disarmament, the Security Council and the First Committee, and we engage substantively with numerous conferences and forums such as the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, to name just a few. We also provide specific technical support and expertise to the various groups of governmental experts and open-ended working groups, and we cooperate with regional organizations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as with our United Nations partners, in particular the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).

In all of its planning and reporting, the Institute is increasingly focused on certain impact parameters and on the impact that our research activities are actually having in the real world and on the ground. In that regard, we have identified five priority impact areas — mitigating global risks, saving lives, building trust and transparency, supporting the shaping of disarmament policy and, last but certainly not least, promoting inclusion and diversity in the field of disarmament. Much of our reporting is structured around those parameters.

As the next slide shows, a significant aspect of UNIDIR's mission is the transfer as well as the production of knowledge. We do not want the knowledge that we produce to sit on the shelf. We are therefore making huge efforts to disseminate it as widely as possible, both on our newly designed website and under the umbrella of the UNIDIR Academy, where we work in close coordination with UNODA's broader educational offerings to distribute and disseminate our research results in real time and as fast and as widely as we can. We offer a number of different courses and capacity-building seminars and activities throughout the year. Our annual disarmament orientation course for newly arrived diplomats in Geneva, which we organize jointly with the Geneva branch of UNODA, is very popular. We have a summer school on security and technology in cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, an annual disarmament seminar in cooperation with ECOWAS and many other smaller capacity-building-oriented activities year round.

In terms of outputs, I am delighted to say that the Institute has been increasingly productive. As of September 2023, we had 89 publications, and we were again on track to exceed the high level of publication outputs that we achieved in our record-breaking year of 2022. I am also delighted to say — and I am not sure that any other think tank in the world can match it — that our publications are downloaded from 190 different countries. Going forward, the focus on easily accessible content and more translation into all United Nations languages will be a priority for the Institute, funding permitting.

So far in 2023, we have organized 105 events, which is two events a week on average. We have seen more than 9,300 participants at our events. They bring together State, civil society and industry representatives, as well as experts and researchers from various disciplinary

and geographic backgrounds, to discuss the full range of diverse disarmament and global security issues.

As we turn to the next slide, I should note that I am coming to the end of my presentation. In our desire to disseminate our research projects and insights as widely as possible, we have realized that publications alone do not cut it. We are therefore increasingly moving from traditional research publications to digital offerings, and I am delighted to say that our list of digital tools is growing and is increasingly popular. We started out with the cyberpolicy portal, which many here will be familiar with by now, as it has been around for a while. In recent times we have developed an artificial intelligence policy portal, a space security portal, a lexicon for outer space security and the BWC National Implementation Measures Database.

Turning to the next slide, we see the list of key areas for 2024. It is not comprehensive. Nuclear risk and converging technologies are something that we plan to focus on more in the coming year. Biological risks are a big issue for the Institute, as is responsible AI in the military domain. We will put great emphasis on supporting space security policymaking, gender and nuclear policies and strengthening weapons and ammunition management, and we will begin to focus more on craft-produced and improvised weapons. We will also work on micro-disarmament and relationships and linkages with climate and youth, as well as conflict-related sexual violence. That concludes my presentation.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research for his statement.

In line with the Committee's established practice, I will now suspend the meeting to give delegations an opportunity to have an interactive discussion on the briefings we just heard, through an informal question-and-answer session.

The meeting was suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 4 p.m.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): Before proceeding with our work this afternoon, I would like to bring up an organizational matter. A delegation has asked us to move the First Committee's meeting on Thursday, 2 November from the morning to the afternoon, in order to solve a scheduling problem. The Chair has consulted with the Bureau and it has been proposed that with the agreement of the Committee, we

will hold our plenary session on Thursday, 2 November at 3 p.m. instead of 10 a.m., in order to accommodate that request.

May I take it that the Committee agrees with the proposal to hold our plenary meeting on Thursday, 2 November at 3 p.m. rather than 10 a.m.?

It was so decided.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): The Committee will now continue its thematic discussion under the cluster "Disarmament machinery".

Ms. Della-Porta (Australia): International security is being undermined by States that are prepared to disregard well-established international rules and norms and by attempts to erode the disarmament architecture. In the context of the challenging international security environment, multilateral institutions that build trust and confidence have never been so important. The disarmament machinery, with the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) at its core, remains a critical pillar of the rules-based international order.

The stalemate in the CD is first and foremost a product of the international climate of mistrust and lack of political will prevailing among its members. We share the frustration of many that the CD has been unable to commence negotiations on the pressing matters on its agenda for more than two decades, in particular on the very long-overdue issue of a fissile material cut-off treaty. Despite that, we believe that the CD still remains an important forum for building trust and understanding. We welcomed the substantive discussions held this year thanks to the efforts of the respective presidencies—including on negative security assurances, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, a fissile material cut-off treaty, risk reduction, transparency, verification, artificial intelligence and gender. Those are discussions that can help lay the groundwork and build the understanding that will be needed when the time is ripe for negotiations.

Australia also recognizes the important role of the UNDC in the light of its global membership. We were pleased that this year the UNDC was able to agree on consensus recommendations for the practical implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures on outer space activities. We are hopeful for a return to deliberations on focused and practical themes in the nuclear workstream.

Australia, like others, is concerned about the abuse of the consensus rule by some in the CD and other forums. We are particularly concerned about the fact that this year the CD was unable to admit observers, owing to Russia's insistence on considering them one by one. That is against the most fundamental principles of inclusivity, and it must not be repeated in 2024.

While Australia believes that the fundamentals of the disarmament machinery remain sound, it is right that we look for practical, achievable measures to improve its functioning where we can. We are open to all constructive ideas in that regard, including for optimizing the respective roles of the CD and the UNDC and strengthening the relationship between them. The Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace is a timely contribution to that discussion. Australia also welcomed the useful discussions that were held on the revitalization of the CD under the French and German presidencies this year, as well as the valuable contribution of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) to that. We hope that the incoming CD presidencies for 2024 will be able to take forward some of the concrete ideas that came out of those discussions. New and emerging technology is having a profound and cross-cutting impact on our work, and we need to ensure that the disarmament machinery keeps pace. That means breaking down silos and being open to new paradigms for thinking about arms control. The deliberations of the Open-ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles for Responsible Behaviours are a good example of that.

Australia also supports the adoption of new mechanisms for monitoring scientific and technical developments relevant to arms-control settings. We value UNIDIR's contribution across the spectrum of our work and have been pleased to support its conventional arms and ammunition programme over the past two years. Another impactful contribution we can make to the disarmament machinery is to build diversity by better incorporating the views of a diverse range of stakeholders, including youth, civil society and academia. And of course, we also need to make progress on gender equality. We were very pleased to join the statement on gender made by the representative of Ireland on behalf of 78 States yesterday (see A/C.1/78/PV.22). That shows the widespread and cross-regional support for continuing to strengthen the integration of a

gender perspective into the work of the First Committee and across the disarmament machinery.

Mr. Soares Damico (Brazil): If the draft resolutions under this cluster and their voting patterns were the yardstick for measuring the level of satisfaction of the United Nations membership in relation to the disarmament machinery, it would be tempting to say that we live in the best of all possible worlds. All of the draft resolutions will be adopted either by consensus or by very large, stable margins. All is calm and tranquil and there appears to be widespread contentment — inside this room, at least. But out there, not so much. The rapidly deteriorating international scene, the growing geopolitical fractures, the erosion of international regimes one after another and the proliferating regional conflicts indicate the opposite. Do the problems reside with the Members, the tools at their disposal, or somewhere in between? It is a chicken-and-egg situation. If the instruments are the culprit — at least partially — we should not fail “we the peoples”. We should therefore define the extent of the repairs needed, whether that means a full makeover, a refurbishment or the addition of some oil to a squeaky wheel.

Unfortunately, this is not multilateralism's finest hour. Of all the issues under its purview, disarmament ranks high in terms of difficulty. It depends crucially on perceptions of trust and security, which lie in the eyes of the beholder. But the situation is far more complicated. The political economy of disarmament negotiations revolves around one commodity — security. On the one hand we have consumers of security — the smaller Powers, which aspire to enjoy higher levels of security but are hardly in a position to assign a value to it. On the other, we have the major Powers, which produce insecurity. They know its value very well. It can be translated in terms of budgetary expenditures, jobs and other very concrete items with political implications. Unless there is a high level of strategic stability or an asphyxiating military burden, there are not many incentives to disarm. There are not many incentives to disarm, unless leaders are involved. That is evident, for example, in negotiations during the Cold War. So, we are looking at a very specific star-alignment to achieve success.

At the normative level, the Final Document (resolution S-10/2) of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD-I) was a foundational one. It assigns roles in a very rational division of labour. Also, it defines priorities and

themes. No wonder delegations are attached to it and, rightfully, fear the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Any effort to build on SSOD-I must have some sort of guardrails to indicate that fundamental past understandings shall not be compromised. Not by coincidence, the report of the Open-ended Working Group on the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (document A/AC.268/2017/2) agreed to those guarantees.

As for the division of labour, we must acknowledge that SSOD-I was off target regarding the deliberative and negotiating functions. The setting up of the Disarmament Commission tried to relativize the deficit of representation in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). But since the Conference's negotiating function has been in abeyance in the past 30 years, the operation of the two bodies overlaps. This situation cannot go unaddressed. Why, then, is the CD paralysed? It is limited, composed by the world's and regional military powers. Moreover, as pre-existing body, it was grandfathered in by the SSOD-I and preserved independent to decide its own rules of procedure. The twin deficits are related to democratic nature and effectiveness. Major Powers understand the logic underpinning their own actions and that of their peers. Despite their differences, CD members coalesced around rules of procedure in which consensus — or should I say veto — was extended to procedural matters. Not even the Security Council dared to enter that territory. The consequences are evident: minimizing political fallout for saying “no” is a powerful incentive to paralysis. Accountability matters.

In any event, the fact that the CD is unable to initiate negotiations does not impede such negotiations in open-ended working groups and groups of governmental experts, within the different existing regimes or in treaties negotiated directly in the General Assembly. Is it not time to regularize the de facto situation and carry out those negotiations within an expanded CD where observers would enjoy similar rights as members and put an end to the artificial compartmentalization? Is security not indivisible? Arms races are never limited to just one weapons system.

I am afraid that nothing I heard in the First Committee during the last four weeks disproves the urgency of undertaking an in-depth examination of the United Nations disarmament machine.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker on the list for the thematic debate. I will now call on delegations that have requested the right of reply. May I remind members that statements made in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to five minutes for the first intervention and three minutes for the second intervention. I will begin by giving the floor to delegations that were unable to exercise the right of reply yesterday.

Mr. Grigoryan (Armenia): I have to use my right of reply from yesterday's meetings to react to the comment made by the representative of Azerbaijan.

Because of time limitations, I can respond only to part of the allegations that we usually hear in the First Committee seeking to justify, deny and, sometimes, whitewash the crimes committed by Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. I will start from the misleading and contradictory justifications.

When Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor in December, that was an example of using starvation as a method of warfare. Azerbaijan started by saying that it did not have anything to do with the blockade, that it was due to environmental reasons and that it had been done by environmental activist groups. But then, when the international community strongly reacted, specifically when the International Court of Justice issued a relevant order, saying that Azerbaijan must ensure the freedom of the Lachin corridor, someone from the Azerbaijani side invented a new justification about the abuse. That is a very well-worn pattern. Afterwards, the International Court of Justice once again issued an order saying similar things.

In fact, Azerbaijan's violations of the arms control arrangements are so apparent that the representative of that country does not even try to deny them. Instead, he is simply making counter-allegations that are very problematic. Not only has Azerbaijan been violating those arrangements, but it has also rejected all proposals for confidence-building measures that would help to avoid new casualties and all prospects for peaceful resolution, showing that the only path that they choose is the use of force.

In addition, with regard to the counter-terrorism comments, it would be interesting to hear whom the representative of Azerbaijan called terrorists. Is it the children of Nagorno-Karabakh or the people of Nagorno-Karabakh? Terrorists have been used in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone twice — in the

beginning of the 1990s and in 2020. They have been used by Azerbaijani armed forces to commit atrocity crimes against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Those terrorists have been members of notorious terrorist organizations. They do not deserve to be named here in this room. But the facts about their presence are very well known. If the Azerbaijani armed forces are to conduct counter-terrorism measures, they should start by identifying and punishing those people who have been involved in financing, recruiting and using terrorists.

We also heard textbook justifications for targeting civilians, which are very popular and common, but when the armed forces of Azerbaijan deliberately target hospitals and schools, there have been representatives of international media, and the images and videos are very well known. There have been many people killed as a result of those actions — around 2,000 in the most recent aggression.

All these show that the aim of the representative of that country is only to justify, deny and whitewash the crimes that have been committed against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Al-Taie (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of Iraq would like to use its right of reply with regard to the comments made during yesterday's meeting by the representative of the Israeli entity about my country (see A/C.1/78/PV.23).

Once more, the First Committee heard lies, inspired by the imagination of the Israeli entity, to propagate and justify systematic acts of killing and vengeance against defenceless civilians, including women, children and the elderly in Gaza. The resulting bloody scenes can never be accepted or justified under any circumstances or pretext.

The Israeli entity has continued to be stubborn and to ignore dozens of international resolutions, including on disarmament and international security. It has resorted to using lethal weapons prohibited internationally against defenceless civilians. That is a flagrant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. That also runs counter to the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and will undoubtedly be reflected negatively in regional and international security and stability, especially in the Middle East. The Israeli entity's refusal to engage in support of the international efforts for the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone

Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction is also a good example of that, and clear evidence of its continued insistence on maintaining nuclear supremacy in the region.

Against that backdrop, Iraq would like to point out that the Israeli entity's continued violation of laws, including the laws of war, will affect international efforts to achieve and sustain international stability and security. We stress the need to immediately establish a ceasefire, open border crossings and allow the entry of humanitarian and relief aid, and after that to ensure a safe and comprehensive exchange of prisoners and detainees. Iraq reaffirms the right of Palestinians to live on their land without settlements and without fear of displacement or expulsion. Last but not least, what is continuing to take place in Gaza right now amounts to genocide. It is clearly part of the war crimes that the Israeli entity has been perpetrating in the Gaza Strip since 7 October. It is a hideous and tragic spectacle that must not be tolerated, and it is having a negative impact on the efforts of the First Committee to adopt resolutions and recommendations conducive to achieving regional and international peace and security.

Mr. Ghorbanpour Najafabadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): With regard to the baseless accusations and nonsensical claims made by the representative of the Zionist regime yesterday (see A/C.1/78/PV.23), I regret to say that I find myself compelled to provide a response. On behalf of my delegation, I unequivocally reject those groundless allegations. We strongly condemn the heinous crimes that this regime has committed in the occupied territory, and we emphasize the necessity of upholding the rights of the oppressed Palestinian people.

We want to say frankly that what is being done to the oppressed people of Palestine and the free and resilient men and women of Gaza these days is revealing yet another layer of the criminal nature of the occupying Zionist regime. Its systematic and organized crimes are reminiscent of the atrocities carried out by the savage Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, but on a larger scale and with more sophisticated prohibited weapons. Throughout its 75-year existence the regime has yielded nothing but war, destruction, insecurity, occupation and threats to global peace. In an attempt to compensate for its embarrassing defeat as its so-called invulnerable iron walls and domes have been demolished at the initiative of Palestinian sons and daughters, the regime has resorted to the senseless bombing of the defenceless

and besieged people of Gaza, blatantly embarking on another round of genocide before our very eyes.

What we are seeing today is a precise tableau of the suffering and tribulations that the Palestinian people have endured over the past 70 years — the censorship of events, one-sided reporting, political and media suffocation and certain Western Powers' full support for the aggressors. Do the people of Palestine — who see no prospects for an end to the occupation and the return of refugees to what has been their homeland for millennia, and who lack the right to determine their destiny and establish an independent and unified Palestinian State with its capital in Baitulmuqaddis — have any option other than continued resistance? Did the democratic vote of the Palestinian people for the Islamic resistance movement leave them with any alternative to sanctions, siege and further threats? Can we expect impartiality in the conflict or justice for the oppressed people considering the distorted media and political suppression that they are facing — after a 75-year ordeal and a 17-year siege of Gaza? Does that not make it clear that the only path for the oppressed people of Palestine is defence and struggle? Ending the occupation of their home — and upholding their right to determine their own fate by establishing a Government derived from their votes and desire — is the response that can best alleviate the suffering of the oppressed Palestinian people.

The fundamental solution proposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran — which enjoys the consensus of all of its people, officials and political factions — is an end to the occupation of Palestine, the return of all refugees and the holding of a referendum, with the participation of all the inhabitants of that land, to determine its political system. Does that solution constitute support for terrorism, or is it those who are providing Israel's arsenals with various advanced weapons and preventing the return of refugees who are supporting terrorism? Is it dealing with the elected Government of the real Palestinian people that constitutes support for terrorism, or is it the legitimization of the occupier by normalizing relations?

With regard to the statement by the delegation of the United Kingdom two days ago (see A/C.1/78/PV.21), Iran firmly refutes its baseless claims and condemns its unwarranted interference, its complicity in supporting the Zionist regime and its failure to abide by its international obligations. We call on the United Kingdom to cease its destructive actions in our region

and home. With reference to yesterday's remarks by the representative of the United States (see A/C.1/78/PV.22), I want to highlight his country's destructive role in the Middle East. In order to genuinely enhance regional security, the United States must cease its blind support for the Israeli regime and fulfil its legal obligations concerning weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, it is essential that the United States compensate for its disruptions to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We categorically reject all of the baseless accusations by the delegation of Georgia about our country. The Saakashvili regime's criminal and barbaric attack on South Ossetia in August of 2008 and the preparation for a similar action against Abkhazia were the culmination of many years of Tbilisi's violent policies against those two small peoples. The situation left them with no choice but to ensure their security and right to existence through self-determination as independent States.

Our country's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was based on the freely expressed will of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples. The Russian Federation was guided in that regard by the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the 1970 Declaration on Principles of Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States. We were also guided by the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1975 and by other foundational international documents. After repelling the aggression by Georgia, our country has guaranteed the survival and peaceful future of the peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and they have been living in peace and calm for 15 years now. The legitimate and well-justified Russian military presence in the two republics is based on the relevant bilateral treaties and serves to safeguard against any possible revanchist steps from Tbilisi, which would risk a repetition of the catastrophic events of August 2008. As for Russia's actions in the Black Sea region, they are fully in line with defensive sufficiency. In essence, they are a response to the rogue policies of NATO States in the region, including the construction of naval bases on Ukrainian territory.

Ms. Alsharhan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to make the following statement in reply to some issues raised by several delegations.

The State of Kuwait reaffirms its permanent and firm position on disarmament and international security, based on our respect for all international conventions, particularly those on international disarmament and security. Our position has not changed, despite the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. However, despite Kuwait's commitment to that position, we are concerned about the general continued lack of tangible progress on disarmament and the implementation of the commitments agreed on in that context. We reiterate the importance of ending the stalemate that the United Nations mechanisms have endured for decades thanks to their inability to make progress on the issues on their agenda.

It also appears that when it comes to nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction, most members of the international community condemn the behaviour of some States while remaining silent about that of others. There is deep concern about the recent events and their escalation in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory that have resulted from the Israeli occupation authorities' continued violations and acts of aggression against the Palestinian people. We once again stress that the war crimes that Israel has committed against the State of Palestine since 7 October include blocking all humanitarian aid and food and water supplies; cutting off electricity; and targeting health personnel, hospitals and religious sanctuaries, leading to the killing, on a pretext of self-defence, of more than 6,000 Palestinian civilians, including more than 2,000 children and 29 United Nations staff members and journalists. Those violations demonstrate Israel's disregard for all the relevant Security Council resolutions and for international law. The international community must intervene immediately to hold Israel accountable for its grave war crimes and continued violations of international law. The lies, propaganda and continuing denials of the war crimes committed by that entity no longer have any effect.

Mr. Gurbanov (Azerbaijan): We feel compelled to make a second statement to refute the distortions of the Armenian delegation.

Although we once again heard baseless allegations that are not relevant to the First Committee's agenda, unlike the representative of Armenia, we will not engage in a cycle of repetition. Armenia's hackneyed fabrications, distortions and deceptions are part of its disinformation campaign directed at the international

community as a whole. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to expect any other rhetoric from Armenia, which is using such statements in a vain effort to divert the Committee's attention from its legally wrongful acts.

Suffice it to say that in our letter to the Secretary-General dated 27 September we presented detailed information, including photographic evidence, about the seized military equipment and weapons that Armenia's armed forces deployed and used in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan until 20 September. Where did those weapons and ammunition come from? From Armenia, of course. Who used civilian objects and infrastructures in the Garabagh region to conceal the location of the recently retrieved weapons and ammunition? The answer is clear — the armed forces of Armenia. We reiterate that Armenia's constant abuse of the Lachin road in Azerbaijan over the past three years, including for the illegal transfer of weapons, ammunition and landmines, claimed the lives of innocent people and necessitated the establishment by Azerbaijan of a border checkpoint within its internationally recognized territory to ensure the security of its border with Armenia.

The main condition for peace and stability in our region is Armenia's renunciation of its claims against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan in both word and deed. In that regard, we reiterate our demand for clear and consistent communication from the Armenians, in accordance with the inter-State normalization process. Rather than ignoring such a historic opportunity, Armenia should stop falsifying the facts, participate constructively in the normalization process and comply with its international obligations.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I will now give the floor to delegations that have asked to exercise their right of reply to statements made in today's meeting.

Mr. Sharoni (Israel): I am once again compelled to take the floor regarding the references to my country made today by the representative of Iraq, and to respond to the attempts made by the representative of the Iranian regime to legitimize Hamas's monstrous behaviour.

Nineteen days after a horrific terror attack on Israel, which included the intentional mass murder of civilians, rapes, beheadings and unimaginable brutality, we are still waiting to hear members of the Group of Arab States condemn Hamas's atrocities. We have still not heard them call for the immediate release of all of the hostages held by Hamas. When Islamic State in Iraq

and the Sham (ISIS) kidnapped their people, massacred their people, how did they respond? What did they do? Did the world stand in solidarity with them or condemn them as ISIS murdered their people? They have chosen not to condemn the beheadings, rapes, shootings, stabbings and murders of 1,400 Israelis, some of whom were burned alive. The actions of terrorist organizations such as Hamas and ISIS are an affront to the basic values of humankind and threaten peace and security in the entire Middle East, not just in Israel.

Mr. Grigoryan (Armenia): I will be very brief. First, the issues related to the continued systematic violations of arms-control regimes and the tragic consequences of those violations are very much in line with the agenda of the First Committee.

Secondly, as we have mentioned and stressed many times, during the recent aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh that Azerbaijan committed on 19 September, Armenian armed forces were not involved. In fact, it was a clear act of aggression against a civilian population with the intent of ethnic cleansing, and the consequence of that aggression has been the total depopulation of the region. And it is a very cynical to say, after committing that ethnic cleansing, that there are opportunities for return and integration and so forth. Similar to the way in which ethnic cleansing was committed in different parts of the region — in Shahumyan and in Baku — hundreds of thousands of Armenians had to flee their homes because of the actions of the Azerbaijani armed forces, and they have not had the chance to return in the last decades.

Mr. Kasabri (Palestine): There are a lot of questions running through my mind, and honestly, I am struggling to find answers. Nevertheless, I will ask them out loud to seek some answers.

I seek answers to the following questions. How many more defenceless, innocent children have to be killed in order to satisfy the criminal mindset of the Israeli war machine? How much longer will the people of Gaza endure the horrible and terrifying bloodshed? When is the right time to save the lives of those who are struggling to survive in Gaza? When is the right moment to recognize all humans as equals? When will Israel uphold international law? And when will it be held accountable for all the crimes that it has been committing for more than seven decades? When will Israel end its ongoing military occupation of Palestine, which has lasted more than half a century? Who enabled

Israel to lecture the whole world while it is violating every single principle that humankind is struggling to conserve? Who allowed Israel to give lessons in the First Committee while it is using prohibited weapons against civilians, such as white phosphorus and cluster ammunition? A lot of questions are running through my mind, and I am in urgent need to find answers.

We will never be able to fully recognize the pain and the suffering of the people in Gaza unless we start to imagine being in their place. What mother in the world would choose to be the mother in Gaza who has no choice other than writing the name, age and address of her children on their bodies in the hope that they could be recognized when death knocks at their door? What father in the world would choose to be the father in Gaza who hears the cries of his babies without being able to rescue them under the rubble? What child in the world would choose to be the child in Gaza who is left with fear and trauma, trying to understand why his entire family has been wiped out?

A lot of questions are running through my mind, but what I wish is that no human in the world will find himself obliged to ask those questions or to struggle to find answers.

Mr. Al-Taie (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor again.

My country and my people have decisively and courageously confronted the most heinous crimes committed by Da'esh gangs. Iraq confronted terrorism on behalf of the world and was victorious.

In that regard, I would like to ask a question: do the crimes perpetrated by terrorist Da'esh constitute a pretext and a justification for the Israeli entity's waging of barbaric acts of aggression using lethal and destructive weapons against unarmed children, elderly people and women? We see pictures and video footages on a daily basis that break one's heart.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): At yesterday's meeting (see A/C.1/78/PV.23), we asked to avail ourselves of the right of reply to respond to statements made during the thematic discussion on cluster 7 "Disarmament machinery". If you, Sir, have no objection, I would like to avail myself of that right of reply.

I want to respond to attacks against Russia in connection with the situation in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). We categorically reject accusations

made by a number of countries. It was cynically stated that Russia was obstructing the participation of observers in the work of the CD, which distorts the actual state of affairs.

In two parts of sessions of the CD in 2023, a number of delegations representing Western States categorically, under various pretexts, objected to the consideration of the requests of observers to participate in the work of the Conference. That position was and remains inexplicable and unjustifiable from the standpoint of the procedures of the CD and from the standpoint of its practice. Refusing to consider requests by non-member States of the CD to be granted observer status on an individual basis means that Western States infringed on the sovereign right of every one of those countries to participate in the work of the Conference. They disregarded the very fact that requests for observer status are made by every interested State independently without being tied to any other similar requests. That is a discriminatory approach. It is unacceptable in the work of the CD or in any other disarmament forum.

I want to note in particular that the references, made by colleagues representing Western States, to the established practice of consideration of requests for observer status of the CD are at the very least untenable, because the very same delegations requested a departure from that practice in 2019, when it was necessary for them and when it was expedient for purely political reasons. Therefore, it is the member States of the Conference on Disarmament representing the collective West that are the primary and sole parties to blame for the situation in which 40 countries were unable to participate in the activities of the Conference in 2023.

As for the general situation in the Conference, the reason why it falls short is the consistent course set by Western States for many years to undermine the basis of the Conference as the only multilateral negotiating body. In recent years, the Conference has encountered egregious examples of sabotage, by delegations of those countries, of certain presidencies, and specifically something absolutely unacceptable in diplomatic practice, that is, attempts to block Syria and Venezuela from leading the Conference.

Moreover, last year and in the 2023 session, two presidencies representing the Western bloc neglected their duties. Instead of facilitating the organization of

the work of the Conference and ensuring the effective participation of all delegations, they advanced issues that were not based on consensus, triggering a politicization of the discussion and distorting the rule of consensus, which is a fundamental principle of the forum. As we understand it, that represents the consolidated position of Western countries with regard to the CD, and it is tantamount to an unwillingness to normalize the work of the forum in accordance with its mandate.

However, what we find most concerning are the many years of antipathy shown by the member States of the Conference on Disarmament that represent the collective West — an antipathy to any initiative seeking to produce legally binding agreements capable not of the hypothetical but the actual strengthening of international security. We believe that points to a lack of even the most minimal interest on the part of those States in arms control and disarmament, at least in a form that would serve to ease tensions, increase trust, strengthen the security of individual States and the international community and lead to a consideration of the legitimate interests of participants in existing and potential agreements.

The Acting Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more requests for the floor.

I would like to inform the Committee that tomorrow afternoon at 3 p.m. the Committee will begin the third and final phase of its work, entitled “Action on all draft resolutions and decisions submitted under agenda items”. The Committee will be guided in that regard by the informal papers that are issued by the Secretariat containing the draft resolutions and decisions on which action will be taken each day.

Informal paper A/C.1/78/INF/1 was circulated online today, and we expect it to be revised further should any new developments arise. We will take action on the drafts under each cluster listed in it. The Secretariat will revise the informal paper on a daily basis in order to update the drafts that are ready for action at each of our meetings.

In keeping with past practice, at the start of our meeting tomorrow afternoon the Chair will explain the procedure that will guide our work during the action stage.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.