

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 28 January 2003, at 10.15 a.m.

President:

Mr. Rakesh Sood

(India)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 917th meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have two speakers on my list for today - Ambassador Sanders of the Netherlands and Mr. Angelo Persiani, the Chargé d'Affaires and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Sanders of the Netherlands.

Mr. SANDERS (Netherlands): Mr. President, as this is the first time that I take the floor in this session of the Conference, let me congratulate you and let me assure you of my delegation's fullest confidence in the competent way in which you will bring the work of this Conference to a successful outcome.

On 25 September last year, my delegation, in the framework of the Netherlands' FMCT exercise, organized the second open-ended informal meeting on the issue of banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, the so-called FMCT. In total, there were well over 100 participants at that meeting. Over 50 countries attended this meeting, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations, some international organizations, as well as IAEA in Vienna.

In his presentation, Dr. Tom Shea, in his capacity as head of the Trilateral Initiative Office of the Department of Safeguards of IAEA, addressed the possible scope of an FMCT. Issues that were addressed in Dr. Shea's presentation included what an FMCT could cover, how an FMCT could be verified, what exceptions for military use were to be made, and what other relevant elements needed to be considered. Dr. Shea outlined once again the need for such a treaty. The CTBT, apart from being an efficient non-proliferation instrument, sets a qualitative limit to the development of nuclear weapons. The treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices would set a quantitative limit on the production of fissile material. An FMCT therefore would be an important contribution towards non-proliferation and an essential next step towards nuclear disarmament.

In the discussion that followed Dr. Shea's presentation, issues discussed included the scope of the verification regime of an FMCT, the financing of the verification regime of an FMCT, the issue of stockpiles (including the relevance of the Trilateral Initiative or comparable arrangements to deal with this issue), and the relevance of an FMCT to prevent nuclear terrorism.

For the information of all delegations, I have sent a written summary of this meeting as well as Dr. Shea's presentation to the Secretary-General of the Conference. This summary has been circulated as document CD/1691. We will keep the Conference informed about the further development of this exercise.

This concludes my statement on our FMCT exercise, but now that I have the floor, I would like to take this opportunity to express the Netherlands' support for the proposal developed by five previous presidents, as laid down in document CD/1693 as it stands. That statement is also made for the record in this particular case.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of the Netherlands for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to Mr. Angelo Persiani, the distinguished representative of Italy.

Mr. PERSIANI (Italy): Mr. President, at the outset, let me stress the great pleasure that the Italian delegation has in seeing you leading the Conference on Disarmament with your ample and acclaimed qualities. We take it for granted that you will discharge your important duties with the best possible results. We assure you of the full support of the Italian delegation and of our wish for success during your tenure.

I have taken the floor today to stress Italy's support for the various and increasing efforts of different presidencies, some of which - namely, those of Brazil, Finland and Germany - have presented valuable proposals. We recognize that even those proposals which have not been successful have brought us useful information by moving us away from avenues not open to us.

Italy's Ambassador Maiolini, in his previous two statements in the Conference on Disarmament, specifically supported the five ambassadors' initiative when it was being formulated on 8 August and after it was presented on 29 August. Now we welcome the official formalization of that proposal, as we interpret it as an eloquent gesture to push the Conference to act. Briefly, we appreciate that it is the initiative of a cross-regional group, taken in good faith by a number of distinguished professionals, who have made full use of all the past proposals and of experience gained from their recent exercise of their August responsibilities in this very body and in the NPT context.

Its presentation has been made in a timely manner, at the beginning of our yearly session and responds to the growing impatience of all delegations here present, in the face of a deadlock of so many years and of many compelling developments in the international situation. Moreover, we attach great value to the explicit indication by the five ambassadors that their proposal is evolving in nature, is open to change, and does not, in listing the different items, follow any strict order of priority among them.

Building upon the collective wisdom of various and repeated attempts made over so many years and during so many presidencies to find a breakthrough in our proceedings, this latest initiative appears, even more than before, an open invitation to the main players to begin the real play. The prestige of being a main player entails the burden of having major responsibilities. The deadlock we have been experiencing for so long is not due to the inflexibility of the great majority of the States here represented. Quite the contrary. The initiative of the five ambassadors is a tool ready to be used, possibly modified, certainly to be considered positively by us all. Those who might still have difficulties with the text need only to come forward with their motivations and alternative formulations - briefly, with practical suggestions for improvement. We do not need another text to be merely accepted as a "basis for consultations". It is high time for definitive agreement on a final formula.

Therefore, we expect that the major players will not let slip this last opportunity. In this context we applaud, as a first step, the political consultations on the Conference on Disarmament

(Mr. Persiani, Italy)

held recently in Beijing between the United States and China. We expect in fact that the major players will fulfil their great responsibilities towards the international community and history with an intensified political dialogue, at an increasingly high level, without delay, without the stumbling block of preconditions, without prejudgements and prejudices. This is a body which every delegation intends to preserve in the light of past successes and present challenges. We cannot accept that, by becoming caught up in the dilemma of negotiating on a sole item or on a comprehensive programme of work, we end up not negotiating anything at all.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of Italy for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

That concludes my list of speakers for today. Is there any other delegation that wishes to take the floor at this time? That does not appear to me to be the case.

Distinguished delegates, as I informed you last Thursday, this plenary will be followed immediately by an informal plenary meeting devoted to a discussion on ways and means of getting the Conference on Disarmament back to work. I would take the opportunity during the course of our informal plenary meeting to inform you about the consultations that I have been having. As you know, under the rules of procedure I was asked to undertake consultations with other delegations with a view to finding ways and means of overcoming the impasse that has faced us in our work in recent years.

I would also like to draw the attention of members to the proposals that I have heard from different delegations during my consultations. We already know - and we have seen - that the group of five ambassadors has formally tabled its initiative in this regard and, in fact, we have heard in two plenary statements reactions to the initiative this morning, and earlier on, too, we have had the occasion to hear some reactions to the proposal that was put forward last year and this year for our consideration as a formal document of the Conference on Disarmament.

That, therefore, is what I expect to take up in our informal session, which, as I have already said, will follow immediately after we conclude our plenary meeting. I would like to inform you that the informal meeting will only be open to member States and observers.

If there are no further speakers at this stage, let me close by saying that the next plenary meeting of this Conference will be held on Thursday, 30 January 2003, at 10 a.m. in this Conference room.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.