

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE NINE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 17 February 2005, at 10.15 a.m.

President:

Mr. Chris SANDERS

(Netherlands)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 974th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the very outset, I would like to say that it was with a little bit of surprise that we listened to our colleague, the representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Shaukat Umer, at our last session. I would like now therefore to bid an official farewell to our distinguished colleague, who is unfortunately not here, but I am sure that the representative of Pakistan will convey to Ambassador Umer what I am going to say now.

I am sure that you will all agree with me that Ambassador Umer has brought a unique mixture of outstanding experience and knowledge, irrefutable logic and distinctive eloquence to the Conference on Disarmament. He has always articulated and upheld the position of his country with authority, elegance and diplomatic talent. As an active interlocutor in each and every debate on crucial issues before the Conference, Ambassador Umer has been well known and highly regarded for his outstandingly clear and elegance syntheses of the complex and seemingly irreconcilable views. His farewell statement, offered to us so surprisingly last Tuesday, was such an oratorical masterpiece, providing us with an insightful diagnosis of the problems facing the Conference.

On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament, and on my own behalf, I should like to wish our distinguished colleague Ambassador Shaukat Umer and his family much success and happiness in the future.

I have two speakers for today's plenary meeting, namely, Ambassador Clemencia Forero Ucros of Colombia and Ambassador Yoshiki Mine of Japan. I recognize Pakistan as well.

I would first like to give the floor to the distinguished representative of Colombia, Ambassador Clemencia Forero Ucros.

Ms. FORERO (Colombia) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, I am taking the floor for the first time in plenary under your presidency, I would like to begin by congratulating you on the appropriate and creative way in which you have been conducting our discussions.

In this general statement I would like to take the opportunity to share with the member States of the Conference on Disarmament the information that recently the Government of Colombia destroyed the last 6,784 anti-personnel mines stocked by our military forces. This completed the elimination of 18,501 mines in the possession of the Colombian police and armed forces for the protection of high-risk installations and military bases against terrorist attack. Following the destruction of these weapons the military forces retain only 986 mines, which will be used for instruction and training of deminers and explosive detection dogs. Work is also starting on the replacement of 22 fields of pressure mines by controllable mines in areas where there are high-risk government buildings or military bases.

(Ms. Forero, Colombia)

The decision by the Government of Colombia to renounce this sort of weaponry demonstrates its firm commitment to comply with its undertakings in the disarmament field. This means additional sacrifices and greater efforts by the armed forces and society in general in their struggle against terrorist groups. This attitude on the part of the Colombian State should produce general pressure on the part of the international community to urge the illegal armed groups to respond to this unilateral act by the State with similar action and free Colombian territory and the Colombian people from this grave, indiscriminate and harmful threat.

We would like to highlight some statistics relating to the use of this sort of weapon by the terrorists. Colombia has the fourth largest number of mine victims in the world - victims of anti-personnel mines, booby-traps and mines other than anti-personnel mines. Every 12 hours someone is the victim of an accident. The total number of victims since 1990 is 2,919; 318 in the current year, of whom 80 have died. Forty per cent of the victims were civilians, and of these 50 per cent were children. All the civilian victims live below the poverty line. In order to clear these areas, the international community, apart from urging the illegal armed groups to abandon the use of these weapons, could also help us by providing technical assistance and care for victims.

Although our intention today was just to share with the disarmament community this new demonstration of the Colombian State's political will and commitment to the cause, I could not conclude this statement without publicly acknowledging the resolve, intelligence, creativity and open attitude displayed by Ambassador Chris Saunders in the interests of moving the work of the Conference ahead, and regretting the fact that circumstances have not thus far allowed him to crown his efforts, as he would have wished, by giving renewed impetus to the Conference. Colombia, as a sponsor of the five Ambassadors' proposal, cannot but regret that this new and creative attempt to reactivate the substantive work of the Conference after eight years of deadlock has again been frustrated. This is particularly worrying for regions such as the Latin American region, of which Colombia is a member. As Latin Americans we are proud - as the Ambassador of Chile said not long ago - to be really active militants for disarmament, rather than just broadcasting rhetoric. The fact that we are the largest nuclear-weapon-free populated area in the world, that we renounced the non-peaceful uses of nuclear energy a long time ago, that we have signed practically all international instruments in the disarmament field, and that we implement them in a manner that is both verifiable and transparent, entitles us to make a sincere appeal on this occasion to the member States of the Conference on Disarmament to shoulder our historical responsibility and to attach to multilateral disarmament negotiations the importance and impetus they deserve as a way of guaranteeing the future peace and security of our world.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of Colombia for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I turn to the next speaker on my list, the distinguished representative of Japan, Ambassador Yoshiki Mine.

Mr. MINE (Japan): Mr. President, I would like to thank you for the tireless and innovative efforts you have made since assuming the presidency. You have conducted close consultations with all CD members and produced some very interesting papers, including the "food for thought" paper. I believe your work will provide a good basis for future deliberations.

(Mr. Mine, Japan)

I have been advocating that the term of the CD presidency is too short to ensure that the Conference on Disarmament is effectively managed. A change of presidency at this point seems only to exemplify the problems we have to address. Nevertheless, I have every confidence in your successor, and I hope that our new President will continue the excellent work you have initiated with the same enthusiasm.

Lastly, as we are all aware, the NPT Review Conference is coming up in a little over two months. The NPT regime has greatly contributed to the international security environment. As Dr. Stedman mentioned yesterday, during the cold war era, there was a pessimistic prediction that anywhere from between 15 and 50 countries would some day possess nuclear weapons. Thanks to the NPT, however, this is not the case. The NPT regime has therefore benefited all countries, including non-NPT members. It is essential that we maintain a robust and reliable NPT regime. Recent international situations have not made life any easier for us. The Conference on Disarmament is not the NPT, but I believe both have to work to achieve the common objective of international security.

My country looks forward to working closely with all other countries to this end.

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

I have finalized my short list of speakers for this morning, but I should like to check whether there is anybody else in this room that wishes to take the floor. That does not seem to be the case. In that case, I will proceed to the very last speaker, which is myself, because this is the last meeting that I have the privilege of seeing you from behind this table.

Today's session of the CD is the last one for me to preside over. I look back on my presidency with mixed feelings. Let me share a few thoughts with you.

I have enjoyed very much working with all of you in an open and transparent manner. I have detected a great eagerness among you to get the CD back to work, to get it to do the job it should do. Yet I have also experienced a degree of fear. Fear of change. Sticking to old formulas, clinging to precedents. I think that any organization that fails to innovate will be in danger. The High-level Panel report shows that in fostering global security, innovation is crucial. And that it should be based on a new, comprehensive approach to security. A truly *collective* security. The report says, and I quote:

“What is needed today is nothing less than a new consensus between alliances that are frayed, between wealthy nations and poor, and among peoples mired in mistrust across an apparently widening cultural abyss. The essence of that consensus is simple: we all share responsibility for each other's security. And the test of that consensus will be action.”

(The President)

I know that any change or innovation means risks could be involved. To repeat well-known, worn-out positions may give us a sense of comfort. Why not stay on the safe side? The answer is simple: staying on the safe side means, in our case, immobility. Immobility means regression in a dynamic and globalized world. And staying on the safe side definitely means missing out on the opportunities that might just offer progress to all.

I come from a country with a long tradition of seafaring, of looking over the horizon. When we started exploring the world in the sixteenth century, there were no maps, only uncharted waters. Often, we had no idea where we might end up. The risks involved in any expedition were considerable. But in the end the rewards of those explorations were considerable, certainly in the context of those times.

I think the CD must face the challenges of today's world, and muster the necessary courage to overcome these challenges, to start sailing uncharted waters, to take up opportunities which all of us know are out there. This applies obviously in particular to new issues. The CD has until now not been affected by United Nations reform, and it seems difficult to agree on any reform in this Conference. Two years ago a Special Coordinator on the improved and effective functioning of the CD could not reach consensus on any improvement. What does the High-level Panel report mean for the CD? I can only express the hope that the spirit of this report will trickle down into the CD machinery and make it work better.

But innovation in our worn-out mechanism is not sufficient to get the CD back to work. Because the core of its problem is political. A small number of CD members are still not in a position to accept balanced compromise solutions on the core issues.

I have tried once more to bring the CD back to these core issues. I believe that with a little bit more flexibility we can get the CD back to work. I fail to see how discussions on improving security in space, or discussions on dealing with the subject of nuclear disarmament, could threaten anyone's security interests. I am convinced that making a treaty on fissile material would enhance security for all of us. I also think that non-nuclear-weapon States do have a legitimate right to address the issue of effective security assurances. In short, I simply fail to see the actual problem, although I know it is there.

Maybe I am not careful enough; maybe I do not see the great dangers involved in any of these activities. But I do not think that is the case. What I do know is that maybe I am prepared to face the risks that any of these activities might entail. And so are quite a few others. My message remains that the advantages of starting work on these issues far outweigh the risks.

I have been working in good faith on these issues. We have seen some movement in the course of the development of the A-5 proposal, although that is already some time ago. Effective multilateralism presupposes a genuine attitude to take each other's proposals seriously. It also means that if you cannot accept a certain proposal, you explain your reasoning behind it, and subsequently you put forward a credible counterproposal. You cannot simply continue saying no, or making proposals which you know will stand no chance of getting any support.

(The President)

So that brings me to the question of where we are today. I did my consultations with all of you on the basis of specific questions. I offered you my assessment of the situation in a non-paper, and I hope that many of you could share some of those findings. Subsequently, I felt that as the first President of the year, I had at my disposal a rather unique provision, mandating me to identify Special Coordinators. There was widespread support for such an approach. But in the end I wanted to avoid a confrontational situation that might have made the situation in the CD even worse than it already is.

So I went back to basics, and offered my personal assessment of what we might realistically try to do to bridge existing differences on a programme of work. Not as an alternative to any existing proposal, but to make you and your capitals think. That is why it is called "food for thought". That is also why I will not convene an informal session of the CD today. It is simply too early.

That brings me to the weeks ahead. I have the fullest confidence in my successor. I have worked in close consultation with him. I have not taken any step without his consent. He will do his own job, have his own approach, and rightly so. But I also know he agrees with me that we should keep the focus on the priority issues and not distress ourselves with imagined things. I wish Tim Caughley every bit of success, and I really hope he finds the decisive elements to get the CD back to work.

I thank you, all the members of the CD, for your support and cooperation, in particular, as I said on Tuesday, those who have made themselves available in case we did have Special Coordinators, and also the five remaining CD Presidents for the year 2005.

I thank the Secretary-General and his deputy and the staff of DDA and the secretariat for their tireless support of my work. They were always there when I needed them. Finally I wish to thank our interpreters; I am sure that if there has been any misunderstanding about what I have said, it is not the interpretation but only I who am to blame.

This concludes our business for today. Of course, I have already said in my statement that I wish my successor, Tim Caughley of New Zealand, every success during his term of office.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 26 February at 10 a.m. in this room.

The meeting rose at 10.45 a.m.