

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

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

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 14 March 2005, at 11.05 a.m.

President: Mr. Tim CAUGHLEY (New Zealand)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 978th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Today we begin a series of plenary meetings during which the Conference will be addressed by Ministers for Foreign Affairs, as well as by other high officials representing member States. In this connection, I wish to extend a very warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, to the Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, who is the first speaker in this series of plenary meetings. We highly appreciate this yet another demonstration of the great importance which the Government of Canada attaches to arms control and disarmament, and in particular to the work of our forum.

It is my honour and pleasure to invite the Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, to address the Conference.

Mr. PETTIGREW (Canada) (translated from French): The delegates to the Conference on Disarmament are more than mere representatives in a specific multilateral body: they constitute a community of diplomats who are devoted to dealing with all issues of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament in the United Nations system as a whole and beyond. I am aware that, in spite of the paralysis that has afflicted the Conference on Disarmament for eight years, many of you are participating in a very constructive way in disarmament activities in a whole range of areas, from small arms and light weapons to weapons of mass destruction. A good number of these activities have in fact borne fruit, and we are encouraged by the results recorded recently in the fields of multilateral cooperation and human security, such as the Protocol on explosive remnants of war to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the Plan of Action adopted at the Nairobi summit to provide better guidance in the implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, as well as exchanges of practical information during expert meetings and annual meetings of States parties to the Convention on Biological and Toxin Weapons.

(continued in English)

These and other achievements of the diplomats assigned here, however, cannot diminish our disappointment over the failure of the principal body, the Conference on Disarmament, to engage in substantive work. I agree with your President and Secretary-General that the revitalization of this Conference and its ability to overcome its protracted impasse will be enhanced by greater political-level support "for its noble causes". If progress on multilateral cooperation dealing with crucial issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and the non-weaponization of outer space is to be made, there has to be a political value attached to doing so and a political cost to be paid for not allowing the enterprise to proceed. Focusing political attention on the Conference on Disarmament's deadlock and its negative consequences for our individual and collective security interests is one way to get us out of the rut we are in.

(Mr. Pettigrew, Canada)

It will, however, take more than a handful of Foreign Ministers showing up this week at the Conference on Disarmament to effect a real change. It will take a realization in certain capitals that continued blockage of agreement on a Conference on Disarmament programme of work is more detrimental to the security interests of those countries than it is beneficial. Unfortunately, in a 65-member body based on consensus, it is all too easy to obstruct and very difficult to obtain the universal support necessary to adopt a programme of work. Canada, as a committed multilateralist, has always tried to be a constructive force in this forum, and we have shown flexibility in adjusting our preferences to accommodate the views of others in the interest of the common good. We call upon the members of the Conference on Disarmament to demonstrate similar flexibility.

(continued in French)

I have already mentioned some important issues which have been put before the Conference on Disarmament but which it has been unable to address as befits a multilateral negotiating body. The negotiation of a treaty on prohibition of the production of fissile material (FMCT), review of the current stage of nuclear disarmament, prevention of the weaponization of space are all questions that impact on our security. However, all of these issues have been neglected at the diplomatic level at the very time when there have been new worrying political and military developments on these issues. The Conference on Disarmament in fact is the ideal forum to make headway on all these issues. We must, however, temper our ideals with a dose of realism, and prevent inaction from taking the place of action. If the obstacles that prevent the Conference on Disarmament from dealing with these issues cannot be overcome, we believe that it will be necessary to explore the possibility of resorting to other multilateral forums to deal with them.

A few days ago, on 5 March, we celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This Treaty, with 188 States parties, is the international security agreement which brings together the largest number of States, and it is the foundation of the multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Next May, in New York, the Seventh Review Conference of the NPT will be held. It will mark a crossroads for the Treaty, whose authority and integrity have been seriously challenged a number of times over the course of the last few years. By withdrawing from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has totally ignored nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. By claiming recently that it had nuclear weapons, and hesitating to resume the six-party negotiations, North Korea has highlighted the serious risks to regional and international peace and security posed by its nuclear programme. The numerous and undeclared past nuclear activities of Iran, as well as its efforts to acquire a complete nuclear fuel cycle, have raised profound concern with respect to Iran's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, as well as serious suspicions as to its aspirations with respect to nuclear weapons. The only acceptable guarantee of the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme would be the permanent cessation of its activities with respect to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

(Mr. Pettigrew, Canada)

Although Canada supports the current diplomatic efforts to find a solution to this problem, we have to be ready, as Prime Minister Martin recently indicated, to move from words to deeds and impose more stringent measures, if necessary. Canada would like the Non-Proliferation Treaty to emerge from the Review Conference with strengthened powers and effectiveness. In order for this to happen, we believe it will be necessary to arrive at a balanced result reflecting practical progress on the three major elements of the Treaty - non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. We would also like the States parties to shoulder the collective responsibility for the Treaty and its implementation to a greater extent by reviewing the provisions relating to meetings.

(continued in English)

Here at the Conference on Disarmament, the focus is naturally on the disarmament dimension of the Treaty. The inability of the Conference on Disarmament to commence work has a direct and significant impact on the NPT Review Conference. At the last Review Conference in 2000, the Conference on Disarmament was specifically tasked to commence immediately negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty to ban production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and to establish an appropriate subsidiary body to deal with the issue of nuclear disarmament. Five years later, the Conference on Disarmament has not managed to accomplish one iota of this work plan. The failure in the Conference on Disarmament to make progress on these two key items of business, when coupled with other failures to deliver on agreed disarmament measures, will diminish the disarmament side of the NPT equation. This failure will make it more difficult to obtain major new commitments on the non-proliferation side. So what happens here, or does not happen here, has real consequences for the larger game of the NPT and the maintenance of what is a near-universal consensus around the Treaty and its goals.

I spoke earlier about the need for flexibility and compromise if a programme of work is to be agreed upon in this forum. Canada has shown this in its approaches. Last summer we suggested that a "streamlined" programme of work involving FMCT negotiations, coupled with discussions of nuclear disarmament (including the issue of negative security assurances) and the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS), would represent a realistic and balanced package. More recently, we have indicated that we could also agree on the four ad hoc committees outlined in the previous Conference on Disarmament President's "food for thought" paper, provided that approach enjoyed universal support. We see the return very soon to substantive work by the Conference on Disarmament as the principle objective, and have done our part in making the necessary compromises to bring this about. We expect no less from every member of this Conference.

On the FMCT, for example, we have long believed that this accord would take a crucial step on the road to the elimination of nuclear weapons, by turning off the production tap of the material needed to fashion them. A former Canadian Ambassador, the late Gerry Shannon, worked hard in the middle 1990s to develop a negotiating mandate for the FMCT, which until recent months enjoyed universal support in this forum. We are convinced that this mandate remains the best basis for initiating negotiations. But because our priority is exactly the initiation of negotiations, rather than arguing over the merits of any particular mandate, we are

(Mr. Pettigrew, Canada)

prepared to engage in FMCT negotiations without any preconditions. It would be our hope that in the course of these negotiations the benefits of “a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty”, as envisaged in the Shannon mandate, would become evident to all. We are prepared to put our preferences aside in order to commence a genuine negotiation, and we would ask others to demonstrate a similar flexibility so that work can begin.

On nuclear disarmament, we would have preferred to see a more ambitious mandate that would consider specific measures and new instruments. We were not alone in this preference, but in the interest of achieving a consensus programme of work, a simple discussion mandate has been proposed, and Canada is prepared to go along with this in order that the important topics connected with this theme are addressed.

(continued in French)

With respect to prevention of an arms race in space, Canada has long been among those who feel that it is increasingly necessary to reach an international agreement banning the weaponization of space, and that this could be a practical exercise in preventive diplomacy. Here again, in order to promote consensus, concessions have been made, and the original negotiating mandate has been limited to a discussion mandate. This is a sufficiently important question for us to approve the idea that, in an initial stage, the Conference on Disarmament could confine itself to discussion. Unfortunately, the flexibility shown by the first proponents of negotiations in agreeing to a dilution of the mandate on this topic was not taken up, and the Conference on Disarmament has proved incapable of creating a committee to start studying this subject.

The non-weaponization of space is an issue affecting security in the real world, and it is certainly not going to disappear simply because the Conference on Disarmament has been unable to find a way of studying it properly. The Government of Canada has already organized two symposiums on security in space, in Geneva, and will be sending official representatives to a follow-up symposium to be held here on 21 and 22 March, this time on the initiative of China, Russia, UNIDIR - that is, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research - and a Canadian body, the Simons Foundation. Foreign Affairs Canada is financing an international group of experts and helping it focus its work on developing a “space security index” which will, we hope, make it possible to prepare an annual report on security in space, drawing attention to events affecting this subject. At the diplomatic level, the time has come to review various options to ensure that preventing an arms race in space does not become an empty project where the content and purpose are forgotten in favour of ritual reaffirmations at United Nations meetings.

Last September, during a speech before the General Assembly, Paul Martin, the Prime Minister of Canada, did not simply stress the tragedy that would occur if space were turned into a tremendous arsenal and became the theatre of a new arms race. He also proposed an alternative solution, and recommended an extension of the prohibition on the deployment of weapons of mass destruction in space, as provided for by the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. We continue to prefer having the Conference on Disarmament as the body responsible for this work,

(Mr. Pettigrew, Canada)

but if it proves incapable of including this subject in a work programme and rapidly starting work on it, we, together with others, will have to look elsewhere. If outer space is infinite, our patience is not. I know that the overwhelming majority of countries represented in this historic room are as impatient as the Canadian delegation to resume important work. We believe we are ready to achieve a practical and balanced work programme - all that is necessary is a minimum of flexibility in certain capitals for this to take form.

It is time to act, and Canada supports the present President of the Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Caughley, in his efforts to secure explanations from member States of what precisely is preventing them from supporting a consensus on a work programme and what other realistic solutions they might propose in the future to achieve this. The "noble cause" of multilateral cooperation in the field disarmament requires nothing less.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada for his important statement, and I shall now suspend the plenary meeting just for a few minutes in order to escort the Minister for Foreign Affairs from the Council Chamber. We shall resume again in about three minutes' time.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and was resumed at 11.22 a.m.

The PRESIDENT: I now resume the 978th plenary meeting.

I have no more speakers on my list for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage before we adjourn? That does not seem to be the case. This concludes our business for today.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held tomorrow, Tuesday, 15 March, at 10 a.m. That is, half past ten sharp, in this conference room, and I thank delegates for being here promptly at 11 o'clock this morning. So, at 10.30 a.m. tomorrow sharp, we will reconvene, and as you already know, that meeting of the Conference will be addressed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. In addition, the Ambassador of Egypt will make a statement on behalf of the Group of 21.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.