

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND FOURTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 23 March 2006, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Doru Romulus COSTEA (Romania)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1014th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset I wish to extend a warm welcome, on behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, to His Excellency Dr. Kim Howells, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, who will address the Conference.

We highly appreciate this demonstration of the great importance which the Government of the United Kingdom attaches to arms control and disarmament, and in particular to the work of our forum. Let me add also that this importance is enhanced by the fact that it has been quite a while since a very senior official of a nuclear Power has addressed the Conference.

It is my honour and pleasure to invite His Excellency Dr. Kim Howells to address the Conference.

Mr. HOWELLS (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): May I begin by saying how pleased I am to be here at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva? It is the first time that a British Minister has addressed this Conference in a number of years, but I thought that, particularly following last year's disappointments at the NPT Review Conference and at the Millennium Review Summit, a visit now would be a timely opportunity for me to set out the United Kingdom's priorities in disarmament and non-proliferation and to underscore our continuing commitment to both.

There is a lot of talk today about the non-proliferation regime being in crisis, the Non-Proliferation Treaty being on the verge of collapse and the United Nations disarmament machinery in disarray due to a lack of political will amongst its Member States. I want to emphasize that whilst there are real grounds for concern - and I understand the strength of feeling in many countries - these should spur us into action, not cause us to sink into pessimism. Now is a time for focused engagement, for a determination to meet our obligations as members of the Conference on Disarmament.

The NPT Review Conference last year was disappointing. Regrettably, some participants - a very small number of countries - seemed from the outset to want to work against, rather than for, a substantive outcome. Even though the vast majority of States present in New York wanted to achieve real advances, a small minority made this unattainable. I do not make this point in order to dwell upon it. I recognize that perspectives on the NPT RevCon outcome vary. Furthermore, I would argue that although the RevCon did not conclude with a substantive final document, there was nevertheless much detailed and useful discussion of ways in which the NPT could be strengthened. We hope that such good ideas will survive and be taken forward in various ways. We have to work with the material that we have in hand. By way of illustration, suggestions were put forward at the RevCon last May on measures to

(Mr. Howells, United Kingdom)

discourage withdrawal from the NPT. These drew widespread support and we hope such ideas can be built upon in the next NPT review cycle. And looking forward is the key to this. We need to learn from the 2005 RevCon experience. The NPT is too important to us all for us continue with recriminations. We need rather to re-engage positively and together, as we head into 2007.

Of course, the disappointments in May of last year gave us an added incentive to get strong and meaningful commitments on non-proliferation and disarmament agreed at the Millennium Review Summit in September. With that in mind, we worked tirelessly with the EU and with the group of seven countries brought together by the then Norwegian Foreign Minister to propose text that we hoped could find agreement across the whole United Nations membership. Well, I have to tell the Conference that we were extremely disappointed that in the end no language on non-proliferation or disarmament was able to be agreed, although many valuable advances were made in other areas, such as human rights and United Nations reform. But here, too, we must renew our collective effort at the multilateral level. It is all the more important that the CD again gets down to real work, the work for which it was instituted: the negotiation of valuable multilateral disarmament instruments.

It will come as no surprise to anyone if I say that the United Kingdom remains fully committed to the NPT and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. And while we see the NPT as the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime and the framework for nuclear disarmament, we will not let last year's disappointments prevent us from moving forward on both fronts. For example, we continue to take every opportunity to encourage all States to adopt IAEA's Additional Protocol and we are actively working with others to formulate appropriate incentives for countries to forgo the fuel cycle facilities. While we fully recognize the right of States who are in compliance with their obligations under the NPT to use and benefit from nuclear technology, as set out in article IV, it is clear that the nuclear fuel cycle presents particularly acute proliferation risks.

I am sure I don't need to remind this Conference that these are the matters of the real world that we have to connect with outside this chamber. This chamber may have a life of its own, but there are events occurring out there which we have to be extremely serious about and we have to tackle as a matter of real urgency. Otherwise, the deliberations in this hall will mean nothing, and certainly mean nothing to the millions of people who are looking for a lead to this hall and this Conference.

There are some particularly interesting proposals in this area, to establish either "real" or "virtual" banks of nuclear fuel, with some element of international involvement. But this is far from straightforward, as one can see from the fact that governments and experts have been trying to find a solution to this for some years. There remain a number of complicated technical and political issues to resolve, but I believe that there is now increasing international political will to reach an agreement on the way forward.

(Mr. Howells, United Kingdom)

We will continue to believe in the need for strong and comprehensive export controls to prevent the uncontrolled spread of nuclear supplies and technologies, a matter, Mr. President, which I know you are very concerned to move forward on. In cases where illicit transport of such goods is already in progress we believe that interdiction under the Proliferation Security Initiative will continue to have an important role to play.

Like everyone else we are concerned at the prospect and growing threat of nuclear terrorism and we are seeking ways to counter it. So we are working actively to ensure the renewal of the mandate for the Security Council resolution 1540 Committee and continue to stand ready to meet the obligations contained within the resolution, and to help others to do so.

Of course, we are also pursuing a wide range of non-nuclear issues, both here in Geneva and also in New York, aimed at improving security and reducing conflict. This afternoon I will be making a policy speech on one of these, the initiative for a treaty on the trade in conventional arms, known as the Arms Trade Treaty.

I have concentrated so far on NPT article IV-related issues, and this is because these press upon us in the international arena. However, if I may, I wish also to speak of NPT article VI-related matters because - clearly - this is an appropriate forum to discuss the issue of disarmament; the Conference on Disarmament, the international community's sole multilateral negotiating and disarmament forum. I share with all of you frustration at the CD's current stalemate and its inability to agree a programme of work for more than eight years. Delegates, what do we think that people outside of this chamber think of us, that after eight years we do not have a proper programme of work? This is not good politics by any definition, from any part of the world, and we need to address it very, very seriously. But this has not stopped the United Kingdom from moving forward unilaterally on disarmament measures. As you have heard many times from our excellent team here in Geneva, the United Kingdom has made substantial progress with regard to our nuclear disarmament obligations as set out in article VI of the NPT.

Action has included the withdrawal and dismantling of our maritime tactical nuclear capability; the withdrawal and dismantling of the RAF's WE177 nuclear bomb; and the termination of the nuclear Lance missile and artillery roles that we undertook with United States nuclear weapons held under dual-key arrangements. As a consequence, we have reduced our reliance on nuclear weapons to one system, namely Trident.

We are the only nuclear-weapon State to have done this. Our nuclear forces patrol on reduced readiness. Only a single Trident submarine is on deterrent patrol at any one time, and it is normally retained at a reduced alert status. The missiles are not targeted at any country. The United Kingdom holds fewer than 200 operationally available warheads - the minimum level necessary for the United Kingdom's national security. In all, the explosive power of United Kingdom nuclear weapons has reduced by 70 per cent since the end of the cold war.

(Mr. Howells, United Kingdom)

But my main message today is a politician's message, a Government Minister's message and an assurance: the United Kingdom continues to seek and to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons. To this end, we continue to believe that a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) is the appropriate next step in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. And let me also make clear that the United Kingdom does not maintain its nuclear deterrent indifferent to our nuclear disarmament obligations. The longer-term objective is clear in terms of our NPT obligations. Whatever decisions we take as regards our nuclear deterrent in future must be and will be consistent with our obligations under the NPT.

Mr. President, as part of the continuing efforts by delegations here in Geneva to break the CD impasse, I welcome your and your fellow P6 Presidents' initiative to reinvigorate work in the CD by fostering an interactive thematic debate in the course of this year. I know, for example, that many ideas and initiatives were raised or noted by member States during the meetings allocated to the discussion of nuclear disarmament. We welcome all such discussion and suggestions, even suggestions with which we might not agree in substance. We have no wish to stifle open debate. Indeed, it is good to see again signs of enthusiasm and purposeful energy at the CD. But let me also enter a small note of caution. Whatever the level of enthusiasm registered in the discussions, agreements will not issue overnight. There are many deeply rooted and variant interests here which will not be easily reconciled. A steady process of confidence-building and enhanced understanding will be needed and the United Kingdom is determined to contribute to such a forward-looking process.

I also want to be clear as well on what we see as the main immediate substantive goal. To our knowledge no delegation has disagreed on the value of starting negotiations on an FMCT. Of course, such negotiations will not be easy. But surely we can agree, without prejudice to anyone's position, to begin negotiations on an FMCT without preconditions?

We are aware of differences of view on relative priorities but to the United Kingdom's eyes it is apparent that only committed movement on an FMCT without preconditions can provide beginnings of a way forward. We should be honest with ourselves: the package approach to starting substantive work in the CD has not delivered a consensus agreement on a way forward.

Some issues are not ripe for negotiation; but that this is so should not be a reason, let alone an excuse, for holding back from negotiation of an issue on which the CD could start tomorrow. The CD is too important a mechanism to be allowed to remain inactive; we need it to meet key contemporary arms control and disarmament challenges. We all claim to want to make progress in the CD, it is time to follow a pragmatic approach: it is time to start negotiating an FMCT.

As a demonstration of our commitment to that end, and to transparency more generally, yesterday we published a historical accounting report on highly enriched uranium in the United Kingdom defence nuclear programmes. This follows a similar report that

(Mr. Howells, United Kingdom)

we published in 2000 on our holdings of plutonium. I have a copy of the report here, and hope to have it entered as a document to the Conference so that it is available to all delegations.

With that, let me say once again how pleased I am to be here at the CD. I am grateful for the opportunity to set out the United Kingdom's commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation. But - as I hope I've made clear this morning - these are not just British concerns, they are global ones and I look forward to working with you, through the Conference on Disarmament, to meet these challenges.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom for his important address. I want to thank him also for his kind remarks addressed to the Presidents of this year's session, the famous P6 by now.

I ask your permission to suspend the plenary meeting for a few minutes in order to escort His Excellency Dr. Kim Howells from the Council chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 10.25 a.m. and resumed at 10.30 a.m.

The PRESIDENT: The 1014th plenary meeting is resumed.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): Since now we have no delegation asking for the floor, allow me to make an introductory statement as Romania's term in the Chair begins.

It is a great honour for my country, as well as for me, on my own behalf, to take the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. I should like to start my term and my brief statement today by thanking the distinguished Permanent Representative of Poland, Ambassador Zdzisław Rapacki, for the efforts he has made to ensure creative approaches to the Conference's activities. At the same time, allow me to stress the decisive commitment of the other Conference Presidents - Ambassador In-Kook Park of the Republic of Korea, Ambassador Valery Loshchinin of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Ousmane Camara of Senegal, and the Chargé d'affaires of Slovakia, Mr. Drahoslav Štefánek - to work as a real team in order to bring our activities closer to their real aim, which is to contribute to international peace and security by means of multilateral instruments in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

(continued in English)

Due to the unprecedented P6 initiative, my opening remarks have lost much of the traditional value, in the sense that the Romanian presidency is not merely restarting from scratch, but rather building upon what had already been accumulated during the first two presidencies. Thus we intend to continue the practice of holding plenary meetings in order to have general debates on all the items on the agenda, as well as prepare and conduct the structured debate on FMCT. The calendar of our tenure, which will hopefully help us reach this goal, has been

(The President)

brought to your attention by the coordinators of your respective groups, and I thank them for that. Both exercises have the same ultimate goal: to provide the conditions for embarking upon the substantive activity of the Conference. The contribution of the parties to this process has already been described by the first President of the 2006 session: while “the CD Presidents bear special responsibility for shaping this year’s deliberations in a way that will foster discussions that might bring us closer to achieving consensus on the programme of work” (Ambassador Rapacki’s statement of 9 February), “it is up to the delegations to fill those frameworks with real substance. The work ... will be empty without the involvement of the entire CD” (Ambassador Rapacki’s closing statement of 16 February).

On the occasion of the 1,000th plenary meeting of the CD, we had a moment of reflection on the accomplishments and the future of this single multilateral body for negotiations on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. As I also think it is useful to look back on what has happened in the Conference for the past years, let me recall that exactly 11 years ago, on 23 March 1995, at the 703rd plenary meeting, the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Shannon of Canada, presented his report on the outcome of his consultations “on the most appropriate arrangement to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices”. I take it as a fortunate coincidence, since during the Romanian presidency the Conference will have the chance to embark on more detailed FMCT-related discussions. This also brings me to the point of reiterating the proposals for delegations to bring experts from capitals in order to have an in-depth exchange of views and positions, to prepare and circulate well in advance working papers on specific questions related to an FMCT and, if interested, to propose side events, eventually in joint cooperation with the non-governmental organizations. In helping delegations to prepare for the discussions, the CD secretariat has prepared and is now distributing a list of official documents of the Conference relevant to the topic at hand that we presented during the last years of activity.

I would like to end the introduction of the Romanian presidency by drawing your attention to a memorable fragment in Lewis Carroll’s popular book, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. Alice, at a crossroads, asks the Cheshire Cat, “Where do I go from here?” To which the feline replies, “Well, that all depends on where you are trying to get to! Do you know where you want to go?” Alice answers, “I guess I don’t really care.” The cat then replies, “Well, if you don’t really care, it doesn’t really matter which way you go.”

I would not like to see myself as the Cheshire Cat, just as I would not like to see the members of the Conference as being like Alice ...

I thank you for your attention. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this time? I give the floor to the Ambassador of the Netherlands, Mr. Johannes Landman.

Mr. LANDMAN (Netherlands): Mr. President, at the outset, let me express the Netherlands’ satisfaction at seeing you in the Chair as President of our Conference. We will do our utmost to assist you in making your presidency a success, and even if there is a collective

(Mr. Landman, Netherlands)

presidency, every single President has his own obligation to do his utmost - as I am sure you will - and you will, of course, need all the support you can get. Therefore, it is important that we can make these assurances.

Allow me also to express the appreciation of my country for the hard work of your predecessors, Ambassador Park and Ambassador Rapacki, whose tireless efforts have given the CD a new impetus. It shows that the CD is already reaping the benefits of the innovative, surely difficult, but indispensable cooperation between the six.

Under your leadership the CD will enter into a focused discussion on a fissile material cut-off treaty. My delegation is looking forward to another series of constructive debates as we have seen in the past weeks when we were talking about nuclear disarmament in more general terms and in a broader sense.

As I have pointed out in an earlier statement, the Netherlands Government considers an FMCT the next logical step, though definitely not the final step, on the multilateral nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament agenda.

An FMCT is one of the essential tools to tackle a number of issues related to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. As was agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, an FMCT should take into consideration both aspects.

The main purpose of such a treaty is, of course, that no highly enriched uranium or plutonium is being produced any longer for use in nuclear weapons. This implies the end of all military enrichment, reprocessing and production activities.

A second goal would be to enhance the safe storage and solid accounting of fissile material in order to prevent the proliferation of nuclear material. Given the increased threat of non-State actors getting access to fissile materials, this in itself alone pleads for a swift commencement of negotiations - and entry into force - of an FMCT. To us it seems even of vital importance.

I may note that terrorism does not restrict itself to a limited part of the world. On the contrary, it is by now a global phenomenon. Therefore, it is in the interest of the entire global community - not just a handful of States - to start negotiations now.

I was pleased to be able to report to The Hague that many delegations that took the floor during the focused debates on nuclear disarmament also addressed the issue of an FMCT and expressed readiness to start negotiations.

Many different views were expressed, however, on what such a treaty should or should not entail. And though some of those views seem to be easily brought into line with one another, other views clearly excluded each other.

(Mr. Landman, Netherlands)

Also for that reason, the best way forward, clearly, is for the CD to start negotiations on an FMCT, and to do so without preconditions. Negotiations provide the best framework for finding appropriate solutions to the differences of opinion I have just referred to.

The Netherlands believe that an FMCT is a prerequisite to a world free of nuclear weapons, creating at the same time the momentum we need to tackle other issues on our CD agenda.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Landman, for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair, to say nothing about his very welcome encouragement.

Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? I give the floor to Canada, Ambassador Paul Meyer.

Mr. MEYER (Canada): Mr. President, let me begin by wishing you the very best in assuming your responsibilities at this time. We hope you and your colleagues will be able to steer us into more productive channels.

I wanted, as we try to stimulate a more responsive interaction, if I can use that term here, just to give some reflections on what we have just heard. I was struck, if not indeed moved, by your reference to the fact that today marks the eleventh anniversary of the tabling of the Special Coordinator's report of a previous - and unfortunately now late - Canadian Ambassador, Gerry Shannon. I think it is very sobering to recall that while he was at the core of devising a consensus mandate for moving ahead with negotiations of an FMCT, here we are 11 years later without those negotiations even having been initiated, and I think we all have to take account of this as we examine, as indeed I thought the excellent speech of Minister Howells in fact enjoined us to examine, why we have not been able to agree on a programme of work that would permit this important negotiation to get under way. He's right to remind us that outside this chamber there is a certain expectation of a result that has been sorely not respected. It may be, as he put it, that this Council has a life of its own - I think colleagues would probably see it more that we have a death of our own, or at least a kind of somnambulance state, and we have to break out of this if we are going to meet those expectations.

I think we're conscious that we do need a sense of some compromise if we are going to move to this programme of work and again I think you were very right, Mr. President, in emphasizing or recalling in your own statement Ambassador Rapacki's view that the primordial purpose of the P6 activity this year was to bring us closer to consensus on a programme of work, and I think that must remain very prominent for us.

As Minister Howells said, the United Kingdom isn't interested in stifling open debate, and I think that's admirable and I wish that was a pledge that we could all make because, frankly, I think that one of the impediments for that agreement on a programme of work is that

(Mr. Meyer, Canada)

some States do not seem prepared to even have the CD officially talk about issues that they are not in favour of, and I think until we get over that, the prospects of being able to reach that goal remain difficult, so I hope we can all in our respective positions make manifest our support for open debate on issues of importance to some more of our members. I can only endorse what my Dutch colleague said about the importance attached to commencing those FMCT negotiations, one that we heartily support, but we have to see it in that broader context.

And finally, a reminder that there is progress in this area outside of these walls while we continue to spin our wheels, and in the presence today of our Vietnamese colleague, I wanted to extend congratulations on his country's ratification of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. As colleagues will know, this brings us now to only 10 States that remain of the annex II States that have not yet signed or ratified that very crucial instrument in terms of international non-proliferation and disarmament activity. I would urge those other States to follow rapidly the good example Viet Nam has given recently.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Canada for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the Chair. Let me reiterate our readiness to do our utmost along the lines of what has already been said in order to bring life both to the Conference and to the debates and this Conference closer to the real world.

Is there any other delegation that would like to take the floor at this time? That does not seem to be the case.

This concludes our plenary meeting. The next plenary meeting will be held on Thursday, 30 March, at 10 a.m. in this conference room.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.