

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND AND FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 23 February 2006, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. PARK In-kook (Republic of Korea)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 1005th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

We have all been deeply saddened by the loss of life and destruction caused by the mudslide that hit the village of Guinsaugon in the southern part of the island of Leyte in the Philippines. On behalf of the Conference on Disarmament and on my own behalf, I send our sincerest condolences to the families of those who were killed or injured in the disaster and to the Government of the Philippines.

At the very outset, I would like to bid farewell to our distinguished colleague, Ambassador Jackie Sanders, who has recently completed her duties as the Permanent Representative of the United States to the Conference on Disarmament.

Ambassador Sanders joined the Conference in December 2003 and since then she has represented her Government with remarkable authority, diplomatic skill and elegance. I wish her every success and satisfaction in her new assignment as Alternate Representative of the United States of America for Special Political Affairs in the United Nations in New York.

At the same time, I would like to congratulate Mr. Thomas Cynkin on the occasion of assuming the duties of Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the United States delegation to the Conference on Disarmament.

In accordance with the timetable presented to you in my statement last Thursday, the Conference will start its general debate under agenda items 1 and 2, as I suggested.

Before giving the floor to the first speaker on my list, I would like to make some opening remarks as the Republic of Korea assumes the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

This morning I feel proud to be the first President to convene a plenary session in accordance with the unprecedented year-long timetable for the Conference on Disarmament (CD) for the year 2006.

In assuming the presidency of this august body, I feel a sense of special responsibility as the first President under whom focused debates on issues will start on the basis of the timetable of activities prepared by the six Presidents (P6). As is the case with all adventures, the presidency of the Republic of Korea starts its journey into not so familiar territory with a sense of anxiety as well as hope. While uncertain where this will lead us, we remain hopeful that this new initiative can help us make a clear break with the past.

At last year's Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director General of IAEA, emphasized the importance of nuclear disarmament when he said: "Today, with globalization bringing us ever closer together, if we choose to ignore the insecurities of some, they will soon become the insecurities of all. Equally, with the spread of advanced science and technology, as long as some of us choose to rely on nuclear weapons, we continue to risk that these same weapons will become increasingly attractive to others ...".

(The President)

For those involved in the disarmament business, the year 2005 could be recorded as a frustrating one in the sense that it failed to seize the precious opportunities to make progress at the Seventh Review Conference of the NPT and at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations General Assembly. And the CD made little progress. But such outcomes do not mean that the CD members have remained passive. Ingenious efforts were made to enable the CD to bear some fruit. Ambassador Sanders of the Netherlands was one of those innovators, and Ambassador Strømme of Norway gave us a fresh taste of the value of substantive dialogue.

The six Presidents' unprecedented attempt to forge a common platform started from the simple belief that we need dialogue conducive to future negotiations and that such dialogue should be structured, focused and interactive, while maintaining a sense of balance.

We are well aware that the CD is not a debating club. But since negotiations entail debate, debates done in an organized way can contribute to creating a favourable environment for future negotiations. In this sense, I would like to point out that the biggest loss we suffered in the NPT Review Conference was not the failure to produce a final document, but the lost opportunity to engage in more interactive dialogue.

These exercises, however well executed, may not add much value to the CD if the Conference does not engage in negotiations on these issues in the future. My sincere hope is that the ideas and positions presented by delegations on these issues will one day serve as official resources for future negotiations on these issues.

There might be some scepticism or cynicism among delegations regarding the possible outcome of these efforts. It goes without saying, without the necessary political will in capitals, a serious breakthrough will surely not be possible. But that does not mean we should sit on our hands and make such an outcome a self-fulfilling prophecy.

We need to restore the credibility that was once entrusted to this body before people outside this chamber start believing the CD has crossed the line of no return, after nine years of erosion and quagmire, into permanent irrelevance. The CD and its predecessor have produced monumental achievements in the past with their successful conclusion of treaties such as the NPT, the BTWC, the CWC and the CTBT. Such accomplishments eloquently demonstrate the CD's relevance as a full-fledged negotiating forum.

As for the work during the Korean presidency, I would like to proceed in the manner I outlined to the Conference already on 16 February. I invited delegations to engage in interactive and in-depth dialogue on agenda items 1 and 2. During past sessions, some member States highlighted the value of introducing sub-items, which can be conducive to focused and structured debates.

Now, I would like to brief members on the organization of meetings during my presidency. First, I will convene two sessions for focused discussion on nuclear disarmament. I suggest that delegations make their interventions under the following sub-items: "Assessment on implementation of nuclear disarmament" on 28 February and "Future nuclear disarmament measures" on 2 March. I also encourage delegations to invite experts from capitals and submit their positions, ideas or proposals in written form for the benefit of interactive discussions.

(The President)

Second, for the general debate sessions, I suggested that the interventions of each delegation be centred on agenda items 1 and 2 to make them more structured, without prejudice to the right of member States to raise any issue which they may consider to merit attention in accordance with rule 30 of the rules of procedure of the CD.

At the end of this year, we may be able to conclude how fruitful these exercises have been. The verdict handed down may either serve as a collective indictment or vindication, depending on the degree of our willingness to engage with one another.

In pursuit of our common efforts, it is worth noting that the CD is still perceived as the sole multilateral negotiating body for disarmament and is playing an indispensable role in preserving the validity of multilateralism. We need not be reminded of the warning calls originating from outside the CD that this could change.

At the same time, it might be helpful for us to seriously look into ways of improving the effectiveness of our working methods, especially in the consensus and grouping systems. The original intention to ensure inclusiveness in the decision-making process has arguably made the CD inert and has compounded the problem of lack of political will.

As the year 2006 is not endowed with significant milestone events in the disarmament arena, as 2005 was, the CD should play a leading role in kick-starting a serious dialogue on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

I hope that the renewed spirit of interactivity and cooperation can be extended beyond the CD in the years to come to help create a favourable environment for peacefully resolving outstanding nuclear issues.

Last but not least, as part of energizing the interest and support of the general public for non-proliferation and disarmament, I believe the CD should be encouraged to explore various ways of facilitating a broader engagement with civil society and the larger global community in an adequate and balanced manner.

I'd like to once again remind member States of the importance of the high-level segment. This year's new initiative of the CD, with its unprecedented year-long-timetable approach, deserves the blessings and encouragement of high-level leadership.

I now give the floor to Ambassador Freeman of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. FREEMAN (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Mr. President, may I congratulate you on assuming the CD presidency, and may I also commend you and your predecessor for the work that has been done thus far, including in concert with your P6 colleagues, for the year ahead? We are pleased with the speed with which the agenda was adopted and for the initiative of tabling the discussion on the agenda items. May I assure you and the other CD Presidents in 2006, as well as the Friends of the Presidents, of my delegation's continuing support for all your efforts? In this regard, thank you also for your opening remarks and guidance for the period of time in which you occupy the presidency.

(Mr. Freeman, United Kingdom)

There are different and complementary ways to pursue wider disarmament objectives, whether unilaterally, bilaterally, through like-minded groups or regional groupings, as well as multilaterally. The United Kingdom is committed to achieving progress on arms control and disarmament in all these different and serviceable ways. Whether in the United Nations or beyond, in regional or other groupings, the United Kingdom has worked and will continue to work creatively in pursuit of measures of arms control and disarmament that can contribute to international security. Arms control and disarmament are not avoidable options. They are necessary aspects of attempts to enhance international security. And in many instances, they reflect or promote international obligations, including nuclear disarmament obligations, the United Kingdom is committed to meet.

It is often remarked upon that the CD is the international community's sole multilateral negotiating and disarmament forum. The United Kingdom fully supports and is committed to achieving substantive progress in the CD in the near future and will continue to work to that objective. The CD is too important a mechanism for it to be allowed to lie fallow; we need to use it purposefully to meet key arms control and disarmament challenges. We have therefore supported a number of initiatives in recent years designed to facilitate the CD's return to serious work. You and your P6 colleagues' efforts to encourage a deepened and thematic exchange is the latest such effort, and we welcome it. And as I said here on 25 June last year, the priority for the United Kingdom remains the immediate commencement of negotiations without preconditions on an FMCT. Listening to the general statements made under the Polish presidency, we have again been struck by the fact that no delegation disagrees on the need to start negotiations on an FMCT. Surely we can agree, without prejudice to anyone's position, to begin negotiations on an FMCT instrument without preconditions? Agreement on this would be core to any understandings designed to break out from the continuing impasse in the CD. Of course we are aware of differences of view on relative priorities, but it is apparent that only committed movement on FMCT without preconditions can provide the beginnings of a way forward.

The package approach to starting substantive work in the CD has not delivered a consensus agreement on a way forward. We need to recognize this and act on this recognition. Some issues are not ripe for negotiation. None of the formal proposals has so far gained consensus, and it is unlikely any will gain consensus now or even probably in the near future. The question is therefore what to do in these circumstances. What is a realistic way forward? There has been throughout the general debate in recent weeks much recognition amongst colleagues that a more imaginative approach is needed. Indeed, one of the more creative approaches so far has been the timetabling of our discussions for the coming year by the P6. We look forward to playing an active role in these discussions, which should demonstrate again that an FMCT is ripe for negotiation. I hope we could start on this and continue to discuss the other core issues and other key issues, and additional issues, in the formal and informal plenaries and see where that leads.

On what the P6 have termed additional issues, like other colleagues, we see value in discussing appropriate issues provided that they can command consensus and are relevant to the agenda of the CD.

(Mr. Freeman, United Kingdom)

Mr. President, you should be assured with your P6 colleagues and the Friends of the Presidents that the United Kingdom is ready to engage in discussions of substance with a view to finding a way out of this unacceptable deadlock in the CD. If subjects are ripe for negotiations, they should be negotiated; if they require more discussion, let them be discussed. But we cannot credibly any longer hold back action on what is ripe, for reasons of linkage. Given contemporary challenges, can we any longer afford not to start FMCT negotiations; and will civil society in all our countries any longer accept a disabling linkage preventing us responding by beginning such negotiations?

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Freeman of the United Kingdom for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to Ambassador François Rivasseau of France.

Mr. RIVASSEAU (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on taking the Chair and extend to you my delegation's support as you steer us through our work in the next three weeks. Important work was carried out during the term of your predecessor, Ambassador Rapacki, with whom we tried to establish the rules to follow for the year to come, even though they may be only indicative rules. Now we have to apply them, to put all this into effect, to apply these rules, leading, we hope, to fruitful exchanges focused on subjects identified following the agreement on the agenda, and we hope that these fruitful discussions will move the discussion forward in our Conference.

The first question we have to address naturally concerns the search for agreement on a programme of work for the Conference on Disarmament. We are aware of the various proposals introduced in our forum and those which may have been discussed informally. They each have their strengths and their weaknesses, their supporters and their opponents. As your predecessor in the Chair noted, none of them at this stage seems to enjoy agreement on the part of all the members of the Conference, and there does not even seem to be any agreement on how to treat any given subject in the context of the agenda in keeping with rule 30 of the rules of procedure. And that is why my delegation believes we must continue to study all proposals with an open mind. We continue to believe that it is important, at the beginning of each session, to take time to step back and think, dispassionately and carefully, about the principles and methods which should guide us in the adoption of a programme of work as well as the stumbling blocks to avoid. The rule to follow this year involves building confidence among us, making as much progress as we can, whenever we can, towards negotiations in keeping with the calling of this forum. Some important preparatory work awaits us.

On substance, I wish to remind you of the words of the President of the Republic, who, in his statement made on 19 January last at Ile Longue, pointed out that "we continue to support international efforts to promote general and complete disarmament and, in particular, the negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty". This constitutes a clear priority for the French mission. France's commitment on this subject, which was reflected in the dismantling of the facilities for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons which formerly existed at Marcoule and Pierrelatte, is well known. In the same spirit, we have reiterated our continuing commitment to these negotiations in the First Committee of the General Assembly of the

(Mr. Rivasseau, France)

United Nations: in 2004 on the draft decision proposed by Canada and in 2005 on the draft resolution proposed by Japan. For us, this is a particularly important commitment because, together with the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, it was entered into in 1995 when the NPT was indefinitely extended.

What are known as “out of the box” ideas must also be given their proper place. Without them, our Conference will not be in a position to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. It was in that spirit that, together with Switzerland, we proposed that the Conference on Disarmament should work on the question of protecting critical civilian infrastructure. Similarly, we support Australia’s initiative to raise the question of MANPADS in the Conference on Disarmament. Finally, together with the European Union, we continue to support resolutions on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS).

Mr. President, the approach which you, together with the five other Presidents, have proposed seems to us to contain the potential for possible progress towards our shared objectives. All of us here have a responsibility to make the best use of it to arrive at this end. More than ever before, we need to be open, creative and dynamic. We must not confine ourselves to the platform offered by the six Presidents - we must now build upon it in the Conference in the context of the political parameters we are familiar with.

In a nutshell, we believe that the Conference can still do a lot better.

The PRESIDENT: I thank Ambassador Rivasseau of France for his statement and kind words addressed to me. I have one more speaker on my list. I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands, Mr. Prins.

Mr. PRINS (Netherlands): Mr. President, congratulations from my delegation on your present position, and also through you, but also to you, our congratulations on this new initiative of a common platform for the whole year of 2006, to the other five initiators of this good proposal. My delegation would want to make a couple of very short remarks.

The first one is that we recognize and we appreciate that you have started focusing on the nuclear disarmament issue for next week, and we see two sessions for the nuclear disarmament cluster, which I think means two half-day periods, and not two full days, and we wonder if that will be enough, and we wonder also if you should not at least set the agenda for full-day sessions, recognizing - and that is why I say this - that at the Presidential consultations it was indicated that the coming Tuesday will perhaps only be a half a day, so one session only in the afternoon, so if you could comment on that we would appreciate that.

Our second point would be on what you said on the general debate sessions. We are rather concerned about those. We appreciate that you have called on all delegations to centre their interventions on agenda items 1 and 2 during the general debates, and that is a good start, but to my delegation, that is not enough. It will simply, in our view, not be sufficient to get a fully structured and well-thought-through preparation and follow-up for the clustered sessions, and in that regard, we would like to discuss with you the role of the Friends of the Presidents which have been identified by the P6 and which we support fully, but think there is much more

(Mr. Prins, Netherlands)

possibility actually also to make use of this valuable instrument. They could coordinate, they could focus, and certainly they could focus on how to better make use of the sessions that you label as general debate sessions, and of course recognizing that in general debate sessions, any State can bring up any subject, but that is not under discussion. It is, in our opinion, very important that we do not label simply general debate sessions as a possibility to somehow go further on certain agenda items, but we need more leadership on that, and I must also say that States themselves, including ourselves, must also take up more responsibility for making those general debate sessions, as you call them, more fruitful.

So, allow me to ask those two questions, if I may, of you: first, on the half-day sessions, I think you propose on the nuclear disarmament issue - and if you think that would be enough, and isn't it your task to simply at least allow for a full day, which, in our opinion, is still very minimal for every sub-item? And secondly, to allow our delegation to ask you how you see specifically the role of the Friends in the coming months.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the Netherlands for his kind address. Before I respond to your comments, I will give the floor to Ambassador Paul Meyer of Canada.

Mr. MEYER (Canada): Mr. President, let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to you on your assumption of this important responsibility. I apologize for intervening abruptly, but I did want to pick up on my Dutch colleague's point. We also share this concern about the scheduling. I understood through the Presidential consultations that there was a proposition that we forgo our morning session on Tuesday, 28 February, because a higher power has asked for the use of this room. I respect that request coming from United Nations Headquarters, but I would hope that that not translate into sacrificing our morning session. I am confident that another meeting room could be found, and I would endorse the thought that we not commence our intensified programme of work by already eliminating the possibility of having a full-day session of discussion on this. So I just wanted to lend my support and specifically suggest that the Tuesday morning session be retained, even albeit in a different locale.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you for your kind remarks addressed to me. I wonder if there is any other delegation which wishes to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case.

If I give some brief comments on the questions raised and comments made by the last two speakers, first on the timing of next Tuesday's session, we will get some explanations from the Secretary-General of the Conference. We have two options. One is that we could use an alternative room for the morning session, or we could have a spilled-over session on Thursday afternoon. When today's session is over, I will convene a very brief meeting with the regional coordinators, and then we will inform you of the final decision. On how to manage the general debate more effectively and in a more focused manner, I will try to reflect every suggestion and comment. I have suggested to all member States to contact me if any member State has any ideas or proposals on how we could run the general debate session.

I should like to inform you that I have received a letter from the Permanent Representative of Malta, Ambassador Saviour Borg, informing me that the Minister of

(The President)

Foreign Affairs of Malta, the Honourable Dr. Michael Frendo, will be visiting Geneva at the end of February and that in the course of that visit, the Honourable Minister would like to address the Conference on Disarmament. Accordingly, the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta will address the Conference on Disarmament on Tuesday, 28 February 2006. Following his address, the Conference will proceed to the focused debate on nuclear disarmament.

Ambassador Rivasseau, you have the floor.

Mr. RIVASSEAU (France) (translated from French): I would like to congratulate the Maltese delegation, and of course it goes without saying that the Minister, like all other ministers, will address the Conference from the Presidential podium.

The PRESIDENT: The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 28 February 2006. The exact time of the convening of the meeting will be discussed with the regional coordinators, and it will be duly announced.

I give the floor to the Secretary-General on the situation.

Mr. ORDZHONIKIDZE (Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations): Mr. President, in fact the importance of the room of the CD has been discussed a couple of times before. Some delegations even overestimate the aura of this room. I think we have to deal more with the political aura, rather than the superficial aura. Actually, there is nothing in the rules of procedure that says that the CD is going to have all their meetings in this room. It is a goodwill wish of the Division of Conference Services of the UNOG administration that is giving you this room upon my request, because I am also with you, and I am very sympathetic to the efforts and trying to do my best to furnish you, sometimes literally, sometimes hypothetically. That is the first thing.

The second thing, as you know from the short history of the United Nations, is that whenever there are meetings of heads of State or government in Geneva in the Palais des Nations, they always ask for this room, and this is exactly the case we are going to have next week when the Secretary-General - and I will read to you from the briefing that took place in New York yesterday - "he will host the mini-summit between the Presidents of two countries, of Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, on the problem of mediation efforts relating to the ongoing territorial dispute". It was exactly the same when we had negotiations last year and two years ago on other issues, including the latest meeting of the Quartet in this room and the mediation between Nigeria and Cameroon, and so on and so forth.

So if you are willing to have a meeting exactly in parallel to this meeting, I don't think there is a problem in setting up that meeting in another room, and you never know, maybe the other room might change the mood. Might change the place. Might change the mood. You never know. In order to avoid that kind of question on problems of meeting places, where to meet, why we have to meet here and not there, I would advise those delegations who ask questions to read news reports, specifically if they are connected with the United Nations business of today. Thus they will avoid and save the time of the President, of the delegations

(Mr. Ordzhonikidze, Secretary-General of the Conference
on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the
Secretary-General of the United Nations)

and even of the Secretary-General, who is always at your disposal, and in general, the more information you have since you are at the political level, the better it is, the better the understanding of the situation it is, vis-à-vis this issue - even the technical issues. Because, as I told you, it has already been announced, and I am simply reading the news reports from the agencies.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. If there are no other comments, I declare the meeting to stand adjourned.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.