CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE FIVE HUNDRED AND NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 15 June 1989, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Alfonso García Robles (Mexico)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): The 509th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament is called to order.

On behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I have pleasure in welcoming the Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Honourable William Waldegrave, who has been a member of Parliament since 1979. Since then the Minister has occupied important political posts in the Parliament and also in the British Government, serving in various capacities as Minister of State since September 1985. He was appointed to his present post in July 1988; his responsibilities include East-West relations and other policy areas, notably disarmament and arms control and the process relating to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Minister is well known to the members of the Conference as the head of the British delegation to the Paris Conference of States Parties to the 1925 Geneva Protocol and Other Interested States. I thank him for his interest in our work, and note the active participation of the United Kingdom in this Conference since its establishment in 1979. I now give the floor to the Honourable William Waldegrave.

Mr. WALDEGRAVE (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): It is a great honour, Mr. President, to be speaking to this Conference under your presidency. I believe that I am right in saying that you are the only person to have held the presidency of this Conference twice, and, as someone who holds what, with respect to my Swedish colleague, is recognized universally as the highest honour that can be won for work in peace, there can be no more suitable person to have had the honour of twice presiding over this Conference, and it is of particular pleasure to me that I address the Conference, therefore, with you in the Chair.

Three closely related themes are at the heart of what I have to say today about the stage this Conference - and the arms control process as a whole - has reached. First, in the years since this Conference was established, there has been an enormous improvement in East/West relations. We greatly welcome the new pragmatism in Soviet policy, and the developments in some Eastern European countries. We like to think that Britain - in particular our Prime Minister through the strong relationship she has forged with President Gorbachev - has been a major contributor to this process. We welcome the political and economic reforms that are in hand, and wish them success.

Nowhere has this progress been more evident than in the more productive approach now shown by both East and West to arms control. We are encouraged that in a number of fields long-standing Western proposals have at last been accepted as being offered in good faith, and as representing sensible, realistic and legitimate bases for co-operation. The new mood is exemplified by the Stockholm Document which opened up military activities in Europe to scrutiny by other CSCE countries. Then came the INF Treaty, the first treaty to make actual reductions in nuclear weapons, with path-breaking verification provisions of the type which will be essential to future treaties.

The prospects for more far-reaching agreements are good. The START talks resume in Geneva next week. In Vienna, the ambitious agenda of the CFE talks has been reinforced by the latest imaginative United States proposals, which

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

were endorsed by NATO at its recent summit. The new proposals will widen the scope of the negotiations, firm up areas of tentative agreement, and accelerate its time scale. The Soviet response has been reasonably positive. There are good grounds to hope for a successful outcome to the negotiation which could transform - within a relatively short space of time - the European security situation. We welcome the accelerated timetable. The United Kingdom will work actively to meet it. It is no hardship, in our view, to exchange an arms race for a peace race.

My second theme emerges from the first: there is a close linkage between improvements in East/West relations and progress in arms control. The uneven progress of the last 20 years has shown how arms control negotiations are particularly sensitive to ups and downs in political relations. Arms control may help to reduce tension; but is itself much harder to achieve outside the context of improved political relations. Indeed, reducing arms does not of itself enhance security if mistrust of the other side's intentions persists, or if cheating is suspected. There are examples of this phenomenon from the inter-war period.

Verification is crucial in this respect - as much to increase confidence as to monitor compliance. The more we have, and the more effective, the better; but only, of course, if the verification demonstrates that there is no attempt to cheat. But the confidence on which successful arms control has to be based goes much wider. Trust is a quality which evolves from a general impression of the other side's behaviour over a whole range of fields. Political, economic, humanitarian and security issues are all inter-connected. There is no doubt, for example, that the process of Soviet economic and political reform has favourably impressed Western Governments. If the Soviet Government shows itself willing, as it is apparently doing, to allow the truth to be told inside the USSR, it is bound to build confidence that the truth will be told outside as well. There is no doubt, equally, of the damage that can be done by old-style Soviet behaviour in certain rather obvious areas. The foundations for international trust - including agreements on arms control - are laid at home. Real security involves putting aside not only threatening armaments, but also threatening ideologies. Ideological and military disarmament go hand in hand.

My third theme, therefore, is that we must not waste this moment of promise in East/West relations. Although events in China remind us that there is nothing inevitable about progress, the NATO summit declaration does not exaggerate when it says that it is now possible to seek to "move beyond the post-war period" and try to hammer out a "just and lasting peaceful order in Europe". To do this requires an imaginative approach to all aspects of relations, including arms control. The NATO declaration, we believe, offers an ambitious and enlightened vision for a new pattern of relations between the countries of East and West. This pattern would replace ideological and military antagonism with the building of co-operation between peoples, on the basis of what those peoples freely choose. Elements of such a pattern are already to be found in Western European institutions such as the Council of Europe, the European Community and EFTA. The continuing processes of economic and political reform in the East, and the lowering of barriers between East and West, should permit closer association between Eastern countries and these institutions. This will strengthen the interdependence of European countries,

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

and our sense of common identity. The process of closer European integration may not be easy, or steady. Greater political freedom in Eastern Europe is the key. There are still many divisions to overcome. But Europeans can at last seriously believe a start is being made.

But we must broaden the focus from strictly East/West concerns. What is the significance of these three themes for the wider perspective of this Conference? Global security is indivisible. The massive armies facing each other in Europe must be of concern to the whole world. Wars that began in Europe have twice become world wars. It follows that the concept of European security for which we are now striving should have its influence in the wider world. Peace should be as infectious as conflict. Moreover, as successful arms control in Europe erodes armed confrontation there, military developments outside Europe will inevitably be thrown into sharper relief.

And it is not one-way traffic. The spread or use of weapons of mass destruction outside Europe's borders could lead to crises with world-wide implications. They could produce devastation in the regions directly concerned, and affect the security of other regions. The NATO declaration acknowledges this. It commits the allies to work to contain the security threats and destabilizing consequences of an uncontrolled spread of modern military technologies. The declaration makes plain that one of NATO's long-term priorities is to work for a world where military forces exist solely to preserve national independence and territorial integrity.

The issue of chemical weapons is immediately relevant here. A convention to ban chemical weapons is the active item on the agenda of this Conference. This is right, for in Europe the imbalance in chemical weapons between East and West is a potentially destabilizing factor of great significance. Outside Europe the number of countries with chemical weapons capabilities is growing. The problem is not just one of proliferation, serious though that is. Chemical weapons are also being used. We have all seen the horrifying consequences of their use relayed on our television screens. It is an awful reminder of our common vulnerability, and the pressing need for a global solution.

The Paris Conference, which I attended in January this year, made clear the widespread revulsion of the international community against the use of chemical weapons. It recognized that a comprehensive and global ban on such weapons offered the only effective solution. The clear message from Paris to Geneva was to urge you - to urge us - to redouble efforts here to achieve a ban. You have put a great deal of work into this. The general concept of the convention is in place. Progress has been made on the detail, although there is still much hard, technical work left. The need now is for a clear, practical, problem-solving approach to removing the remaining obstacles.

Verification remains the top priority. For a convention to work it needs verification which works. The existing verification provisions go a long way towards achieving this. But areas of particular concern remain. We must be satisfied that all high-risk facilities and activities are adequately covered, whether they are dual-purpose production plants or military installations. Further efforts are needed. The British approach is on two levels: practical verification proposals and efforts to shape the climate of international opinion.

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

On the practical level, we have recently presented ideas for ad hoc inspections to strengthen the verification framework. Our aim was to carry forward the debate originating with the proposals of Australia and the Federal Republic of Germany in this area. More work is needed in this key area in order to establish a convincing structure for the verification régime. We have also recently presented a working paper on novel agents which aims to point up issues which have to be addressed in the negotiations. It is essential that the convention should be able to deal effectively with developments in chemical and biochemical technology.

On challenge inspection, we have been concentrating on a comprehensive programme of national trial inspections at a wide range of military facilities. Challenge inspection will of course be crucial to the verification of a convention. Yet there is still uncertainty about how to reconcile the rigour necessary for effective verification with the protection of legitimate national or commercial secrets. Our national trial inspections are starting to produce some answers. The paper, CD/921, which I have the honour to present today offers some interim observations in the light of our experience to date in trials at ammunition storage facilities. We will be giving a presentation on this subject with supporting video material during this session. And we hope to offer more considered conclusions after further practice inspections at more sensitive facilities.

We hope the United Kingdom's experience will be useful to others. For our part, we have found these trials invaluable. We strongly encourage others to carry out similar trials, if they have not already done so. The benefits of practical experimentation have also come out clearly in the considerable number of routine civil trial inspections held by various nations. Two points have emerged particularly strongly - concerns over commercial secrecy, and the need for work on verification technology. It is right that you should be looking closely at these issues. The time is now ripe to assess the lessons learnt from the trials for the "rolling text".

I return here to the second of the themes I introduced earlier. Underlying all this work is the basic question of confidence. Confidence between East and West is growing in many areas. Chemical weapons must not be exempt. This is why the lack of Soviet openness about their stockpile matters. It damages that indivisible quality of trust. We hope that the general improvement in the Soviet attitude to publishing data will soon extend to the area of chemical weapons, where evasion and distrust are currently a major obstacle to progress. NATO and the Warsaw Pact are well placed to offer a lead.

But all countries - not just NATO and the Warsaw Pact - have a collective responsibility to demonstrate in practical ways their commitment to the control of chemical weapons. We must all take practical steps to control the proliferation of chemical weapons and join international efforts to apply pressure to countries seeking to conceal their production or use. We must all give data on our national chemical weapons capability where this exists. We must all honour existing international obligations against the use of chemical weapons. Above all, we must recognize that the leap-frogging acquisition of chemical weapons undermines rather than enhances security, and we must work

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

seriously - here in the Conference on Disarmament - for a global ban. The United Kingdom feels an increasing urgency about this. Our response must not be simply to bypass the work which remains to be done, but to put our backs into doing that work. Hence the detailed papers we keep tabling.

It is sometimes argued that the acquisition of chemical weapons is a justifiable response to the possession or acquisition of nuclear or conventional weapons by other States - whether suspected or actual. This is a false argument. There is no evidence that chemical weapons have ever had this deterrent effect in the past. But what we can predict is that, wherever they are introduced, chemical weapons are likely to have a destabilizing effect on the local balance of power as the other side looks for ways to catch up. In the medium term, everyone will gain from the verified, total ban which is the prime aim of this Conference. As for the threat from nuclear weapons, the best way to reduce that is not to oppose them with other weapons, but through a common effort to reduce existing numbers, and prevent nuclear proliferation.

The corner-stone of these efforts is the non-proliferation Treaty, the most important achievement of this Conference's forerunner, the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament. The fourth NPT review conference takes place next year. It is important to give the Treaty our continuing support. The non-proliferation Treaty has left a durable - and vital - legacy. It has established an international climate hostile to proliferation. It is the most successful arms control treaty ever. Its signatories now total 138, with the recent welcome additions of Bahrain and Qatar.

We must not forget that in the early 1960s there was no established differentiation between nuclear research and development for peaceful and on the other hand military purposes. Many countries had the scientific and economic means to become nuclear-weapon States. The late President Kennedy speculated that by now there might be 20-30 nuclear-weapon States. That these fears have proved unfounded is thanks in large part to the non-proliferation Treaty. Since the Treaty came into force the number of nuclear-weapon States has been restricted to five.

The non-proliferation régime is more vital now than ever. As technology becomes more accessible, the non-proliferation Treaty needs to be kept in place for the security of all of us. This is particularly so for the non-nuclear-weapon States, which have considerably more to lose than nuclear-weapon States from additional countries acquiring a nuclear capability.

Certainly it is true that nuclear weapons are part of the European equation. But it has taken a long time to establish stable deterrence between East and West, and the process was not without its moments of tension. Regions where nuclear weapons do not already exist can only lose, in terms of security, from their introduction. It is all the more important to preserve the non-proliferation régime at a time when the prospects for cutting existing nuclear weapons are better than for many years. Article VI of the non-proliferation Treaty enshrines the commitment to pursue negotiations on effective nuclear disarmament measures - an obligation which the nuclear-weapon States take seriously. It was no accident that the

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

super-Powers announced their intention to begin bilateral talks on strategic nuclear weapons on the very day on which the Treaty opened for signature. Progress has up to now been slow. But I return again to my opening themes: negotiations were hindered for many years by the overall climate of East-West confrontation. But the climate now is very different. INF and START agreements will cut nuclear arsenals. NATO stockpiles of nuclear warheads in Europe have been reduced by 35 per cent in 10 years.

There is a growing corpus of agreements designed to build confidence and reduce the risk of incidents between the members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. As East/West co-operation grows, there is an increasing readiness to work together to help resolve regional conflicts and global problems. All these developments enhance international security, which nuclear proliferation can only undermine. We welcome United States and Soviet moves to ratify the threshold test-ban Treaty and peaceful nuclear explosions Treaty. It is right that thought should then be given to further steps to control nuclear testing, as verification technology improves, and in parallel with progress in other areas of arms control. But an immediate move to a comprehensive test ban would be premature, and perhaps even destabilizing.

In East/West relations security will depend for the foreseeable future on deterrence based, in part, on nuclear weapons. That will mean a continuing requirement to conduct underground nuclear tests to ensure that our nuclear weapons remain effective and up to date. Throughout this gradual process of building up trust, and building down arsenals, the non-proliferation Treaty will remain an essential framework. There is no question, in the United Kingdom's view, of allowing the Treaty to lapse, or replacing it by a different type of agreement when it falls due for extension in 1995. The non-proliferation Treaty works, and it works well. I think there is an American saying: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". Far better to work to reinforce it by encouraging all those countries which have not yet signed it to do so, and by further progress in East/West nuclear arms control.

The remarkable paintings on the walls and ceilings of this chamber symbolize contact and friendship between different regions of the globe. There are hopeful signs that the habit of co-operation is growing between East and West. But we must also look further afield. Security in Europe cannot exist in a vacuum. It can help promote security elsewhere in the world; but it can be damaged by insecurity elsewhere. We must work now to achieve the former and avoid the latter. Regional proliferation - nuclear and chemical - threatens to negate the East/West gains we have worked so hard to achieve. International stability is our common responsibility. It would be folly, and gross irresponsibility, with so much to play for, if we allowed the destabilizing influence of chemical weapons and nuclear proliferation to get out of hand. It is the job of the Conference on Disarmament to prevent that happening. The time is right. We must provide decisive leadership to all the nations in establishing the common mechanisms and exercising the restraint which will permit security and peace for us all. I wish you success in your work.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Honourable William Waldegrave for his visit to this Conference, for his statement and for his kind words addressed to the Chair.

Now I should like to turn to another matter. Today the secretariat has circulated a timetable of meetings to be held by the Conference and its subsidiary bodies during the coming week. The timetable was prepared after consultations with the chairmen of the ad hoc committees. As is customary, the timetable is indicative and is subject to change if necessary. If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Conference adopts the timetable.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held on Tuesday 20 June at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.