
Conference on Disarmament

8 September 2009

English

Final record of the one thousand one hundred and fifty-ninth plenary meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 8 September 2009, at 10.20 a.m.

President: Mr. Christian Strohal(Austria)

The President: I declare open the 1159th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Allow me, before we proceed to the speakers, to welcome our newest colleague, Ambassador Mikhail Khvostov of Belarus. He served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of his country between 2000 and 2003, and most recently as Ambassador of Belarus to the United States. On behalf of the Conference, I wish to welcome him and to assure him of our full cooperation. We certainly look forward to cooperating with him, in particular also in the framework of next year's P-6.

With that, I can move on to the list of speakers for today's meeting. The first speaker on my list is Ambassador Khvostov.

Mr. Khvostov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Thank you, Mr. President, for the kind words you addressed to me. First of all I would like to welcome you to your post and thank you for the untiring efforts you are making in leading the work of the Conference in this concluding phase. I would also like to express my great praise for the efforts of our colleagues from the P-6 — the Ambassadors of Viet Nam, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Argentina and Australia — who with professionalism and selflessness have moved the work of the Conference forward this year. And thanks to these activities we have all witnessed a positive dynamic in the Conference during the current session.

I would also like most sincerely to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, to whom I gave my credentials last week.

I would like to dwell briefly on the fundamental approaches adopted by Belarus to issues of disarmament and national security.

The area of international security, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament has always enjoyed the highest priority in Belarus's foreign policy. That explains why the leadership of my country decided without any preconditions to give up the right to possess nuclear weapons, which Belarus had inherited from the Soviet Union. It should be pointed out that the process of Belarus's renunciation of nuclear weapons and surplus conventional weapons was far from easy, both politically and economically. Belarus reduced the size of its arms forces and eliminated its military arsenals in a situation exacerbated by the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. In the subsequent years Belarus has registered as a party to practically all multilateral and regional agreements and regimes aimed at the reduction, control and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

For us the strengthening of regional security structures both on the European continent and also in the Eurasian area as a whole is particularly significant. We take a positive view of the existing dynamics in relations in this area with our historic allies – the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. At the same time we are aiming at fruitful dialogue and cooperation with our Western partners – the European Union and the United States.

Returning to the Conference on Disarmament, I would like to point out that Belarus pays great attention to the activities of this most important multilateral negotiating body, which has a major impact on the activities of other disarmament forums. In assessing the situation that has taken shape here this year I have mixed feelings.

On the one hand, the adoption of the Conference's programme of work on 29 May of this year, thanks to the incredible diplomatic efforts and skill of our friend Algerian Ambassador Idriss Jazairy, was for many a positive sign, and a symptom of taking the multilateral disarmament machinery out of the dead end of paralysis. Of particular value in our opinion is the fact that the Conference managed to achieve understanding on the need to carry out negotiations on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty on prohibition of the production of fissile material.

On the other hand, the fact that the Conference is not ready to implement its own programme of work demonstrates that we still have not managed to achieve the balance of national security interests which would be a testimony to our willingness to actually move towards nuclear disarmament. Unfortunately, while we are considering from which direction we should approach this process, the world has not become a safer place. On the contrary – such challenges and threats as international terrorism and climate change have become more acute. These challenges, added to the traditional issues on the disarmament agenda, may significantly change the geometry of international security. And in this connection in 2010 we will have no option other than to achieve consensus taking into account the views of all States members.

Today many politicians, public figures and simple citizens are wondering: why have the remarkable projects of the previous generation of disarmament diplomats remained unrealized? Why, year after year, are the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations dealing with the activities of the existing forums and structures in the field of international security, arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament not being implemented? It is up to us to answer those questions.

Mr. President, allow me to assure you that Belarus, in preparing to take up the baton of the presidency of the Conference in February next year, is fully aware of the responsibility which the President of the Conference bears to identify opportunities for progress. In this connection, as a member of the Bureau of six Presidents for next year, I would like to support the efforts made by the Conference in 2009. I would also like to thank you for the work which has resulted in the draft report of the Conference to the United Nations General Assembly distributed last week – an extremely well-balanced document, in our view. Belarus supported and continues to support document CD/1864 and is convinced that it should be a starting point for our joint progress next year. Finally, we would like to express our willingness to cooperate extremely closely within the Bureau of Presidents for 2010 and to build up the necessary cooperation for that purpose before this year ends.

The President: I thank the Ambassador of Belarus for his statement and for his kind words. The next speaker on the list is Ambassador Marius Grinius of Canada.

Mr. Grinius (Canada): I take the floor on the subject of the 2009 UNIDIR Seminar on Space Security, which took place on 15–16 June in this chamber. This year's seminar, entitled "Moving towards a safer space environment", was organized by UNIDIR with financial and material support from the Governments of the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation and Canada, as well as from the Secure World Foundation and the Simons Foundation.

UNIDIR has compiled a conference report of this seminar, copies of which are available from UNIDIR. I have submitted this report to Secretary-General Ordzhonikidze with the request that this report be issued as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament and distributed to all member and observer States. It would be my request to the secretariat that, as per our practice in recent years, this document be duly referenced in the appropriate place in this year's Conference report to the General Assembly in part III (C).

The President: I thank Ambassador Grinius of Canada for his statement. I have no more speakers on my list. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? That does not seem to be the case, so let me move on and refer to the decision which I already mentioned at last week's plenary, a decision taken at the 946th plenary meeting in 2004, which inter alia states that after the Conference on Disarmament adopts a programme of work, it will allocate one informal plenary meeting per annual session to NGOs to address the Conference.

In line with the procedure provided for in this decision, and following a range of consultations after last week's announcement, I have also provided the required information regarding the NGOs in whose name the request came to address the Conference. This information was made available to all regional coordinators, and I understand from their replies that there is no objection to holding such an informal plenary meeting and allowing the NGOs to address the Conference during this year's session.

So I would like to propose that immediately after the adjournment of this formal plenary meeting, we will open an informal plenary meeting to allow these NGOs to address the Conference. This decision is without prejudice to future decisions on the same matter.

It is my understanding that Ms. Susi Snyder from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom would like to address the Conference on behalf of the NGO Committee on Disarmament. I take it there are no objections to this procedure.

It was so decided.

The President: So as I have said, after adjourning this meeting, we will convene in an informal open plenary meeting allocated to NGOs to address this Conference. Thereafter, we will convene in another informal plenary open to members and observers only to proceed with the first reading of the draft report on the 2009 session.

The informal plenary will start in five minutes, and the next formal plenary of the Conference will be announced by the secretariat.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.