



General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

319th meeting

Monday, 2 April 2012, 10 a.m.

New York

Chair: Mr. Román-Morey (Peru)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I declare open the 319th plenary meeting, the first meeting of the 2012 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

Before turning to the first item on the agenda, allow me, on behalf of the all members of the Commission and all participants, to extend our warmest welcome to His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly, and Ms. Angela Kane, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, which will provide substantive support to the Commission's session.

The presence of the President and Ms. Kane here today underscores the importance of the Disarmament Commission, in general, and Member States' high expectations of this session, in particular. I would also like to extend my sincere gratitude to Mr. Shaaban Shaaban, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management, whose Department at the Secretariat is responsible for servicing the Disarmament Commission.

It now gives me great pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Al-Nasser (President of the General Assembly): I am glad to be here this morning at the opening of the

2012 session of the Disarmament Commission as this important body begins a new three-year cycle. Let me start my brief message by welcoming and congratulating Ms. Angela Kane, who was recently appointed High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and by wishing her well in her new post. I am certain that Ms. Kane's impressive professional record will continue in her new capacity. While commending the positive efforts of His Excellency Mr. Hamid Al Bayati of Iraq as Chair of the 2011 session of the Disarmament Commission, I wish to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Enrique Román-Morey on his election as Chair of this session of the Commission. I am sure that his profound experience in the area of disarmament will reflect very positively on the work of the session and the prospects for its successful conclusion. I also wish to congratulate the members of the Bureau.

There is no doubt that the United Nations bodies that make up its disarmament machinery are currently at a crucial juncture. They face serious challenges, posed by a lack of political will and growing resistance to initiative and compromise. In the case of the Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament, that has brought the work of both bodies to a stalemate for over a decade. That situation cannot, and indeed should not, continue.

Against that background, I cannot stress enough the responsibility and opportunity that we all share today to put the disarmament machinery, including the

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Disarmament Commission, back on track. Yet, it is only with leadership, dedication to our collective objectives and compromise that that can be achieved.

In past years, the Disarmament Commission has provided not only a valuable platform for important deliberations on disarmament priority topics, but also a platform for agreement on various important documents and guidelines that continue to serve as key references today. It was therefore a source of concern to see that, for the twelfth consecutive year, Member States could not reach agreement on an outcome to the 2011 session.

Given the history underlying the creation of the United Nations disarmament machinery, including the Disarmament Commission, at the 1978 first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and highlighting the achievements arrived at by that body, I found it essential to be here today to communicate a message of support and encouragement and to urge all participants to exert all necessary efforts to seize the opportunity presented by this session.

In order to face this serious challenge and revive those crucial multilateral bodies, I wish to ask all members to work together in a spirit of constructive cooperation and compromise, and to let their work be guided by the intention to make this session a solid building block in a successful three-year cycle that can bring results contributing to international security and stability.

Along with my Office, I remain willing to extend any help as you, Mr. Chair, might deem appropriate, to support your important endeavour.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank His Excellency the President of the General Assembly for his very promising words. I thank him for the support that he is offering us, and I am certain that the Assembly will do its very best to achieve the success that is being asked of us.

I take this opportunity to extend to Ms. Angela Kane, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, my most sincere congratulations on her recent appointment.

I now give the floor to Ms. Kane.

Ms. Kane (High Representative for Disarmament Affairs): I have the pleasure to read out a statement by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who, as members know, is very engaged in disarmament matters. He has just returned from the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit, held last week.

“I am pleased to send greetings to all delegations on the opening of the 2012 session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, and wish at the outset to congratulate Ambassador Enrique Román-Morey of Peru as he assumes his duties as Chair.

“This is a very important year for the Commission, and not just because 2012 marks the sixtieth anniversary of its establishment. The Commission is commencing a new three-year cycle of deliberations and is expected to consider profoundly important issues relating to nuclear disarmament and the regulation of conventional armaments.

“The existence of differences in the policies and priorities of Member States is not a new challenge facing the Commission, which has a long history of overcoming such obstacles, even in times of great instability in international relations. Although the Commission rarely met between 1959 and 1978, it was later able to adopt various guidelines and recommendations, until 1999, its last truly productive year of consensus.

“So the Commission today has only one responsible course to follow. It must focus its deliberations on finding common ground for addressing current and emerging global challenges, ranging from the elimination of the deadliest weapons of mass destruction to the reduction and limitation of conventional arms.

“I remain personally committed to doing all I can to advance disarmament goals. Progress is vitally needed because — directly or indirectly — it has the potential to benefit all other goals of the United Nations, just as the failure of disarmament efforts would jeopardize the security and prosperity of all.

“My commitment is reflected not only in my past efforts to revitalize multilateral cooperation on disarmament, but also in the five-year action agenda that I outlined this year. I have full confidence that Ms. Angela Kane, the new High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, will build on the accomplishments of her distinguished predecessors as we implement the agenda.

“Please accept my very best wishes for a productive session.”

That concludes the statement of the Secretary-General.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as High Representative for Disarmament.

I am very honoured to address the Disarmament Commission as it opens its 2012 substantive session and wish to commend its departing Chair, Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati, for his competent stewardship of the work of the Commission and to recognize with appreciation the many efforts made by his Bureau. I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Enrique Román-Morey on his election as Chair of the 2012 session. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist the Chair, the Bureau and all delegations throughout this session.

Because this is my first opportunity to address the Commission in my capacity as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I would like to say just a few words of a personal nature, while paying tribute to my predecessor, Sergio Duarte, who has worked so tirelessly and with such dedication to further our goals in the field of disarmament.

I began working in the Secretariat some 30-plus years ago and later joined the Department for Disarmament Affairs in the 1980s, when I had the privilege of working on the World Disarmament Campaign. I have since learned that while you can take the person out of disarmament, you cannot take disarmament out of the person. There is a good reason for that: the fate of humanity very much depends on the progress made in this field.

While in recent years progress has been limited in the area of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, the international community has a history of overcoming disappointments in this field, which offers us something on which to build. Let us consider the following.

When I started my career at the United Nations, four of the world's five nuclear-weapon-free zones had not yet been established. There was no Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Biological Weapons Convention had less than half of the 163 parties it has today. There was no Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and no indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. There was no START treaty, no Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, no New START treaty, no Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, no inhumane weapons Convention, no Convention on Cluster Munitions, no Programme of Action on small arms, no General Assembly special

sessions on disarmament, no Security Council summits addressing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues, and no detailed proposal by a Secretary-General for achieving global nuclear disarmament. In addition, several of the major regional conventional arms treaties around the world had not yet been concluded.

There has been some welcome progress in disarmament and non-proliferation education, where programmes have succeeded in reaching a new generation, which, sooner than we all might realize, will have to bear its own responsibilities in those challenging fields. The challenges ahead in this field are to sustain and expand this progress.

Prior to 1977, there was a stretch of 18 years during which it met rarely. Yet in the 20 years that followed, from 1979 to 1999, it was able to adopt by consensus 16 guidelines, recommendations and declarations. As we consider the Commission's inability to achieve a consensus since 1999, we sometimes forget that progress is possible even amid great differences among the policies and priorities of our Member States. If such progress was possible during some of the darker days of the cold war, surely such progress should be possible today.

The Commission continues to play an important role in the overall United Nations disarmament machinery, primarily through its deliberations on specific issues relating to nuclear weapons and conventional arms. The guidelines and recommendations adopted by the Commission have the potential not only to inspire future General Assembly resolutions, but also can potentially lay the conceptual foundations for new multilateral treaties. Fulfilling that potential, however, will require the Commission to be much more than a platform for articulating national policies.

When the Commission has made progress, it has done so because its members have recognized how national interests are advanced by the pursuit of common interests. The greatest obstacles to progress in disarmament have long been lack of trust or confidence in proposed initiatives due to uncertainties or possibly suspicions about their true motivations. The purely deliberative role of the Commission offers one way of breaking down such suspicions. That may well be the greatest contribution the Commission can make in meeting global disarmament challenges.

If fresh thinking and new ideas are needed, the Commission may wish to revisit past proposals to invite

experts to join its deliberations. I note that at the end of its 2008 session, the Commission discussed the Chair's proposal on procedural and organizational elements for the possible participation of experts in the work of the Commission and also decided to continue the consideration of this issue in future.

The Commission's 2012 session is occurring in a dynamic political environment. Soon, the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will hold its first session. Soon, negotiations will begin at the United Nations on an arms trade treaty. Soon, States will review the implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Soon, preparations will be under way to open a new session of the First Committee. Finally, by the end of 2012, a conference will convene to consider the issue of establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Today, we are seeing countless initiatives to promote disarmament and the regulation of armaments. It is clear that the Commission has its own contributions to make in those areas. Some positive steps by the Disarmament Commission could well help to promote progress elsewhere in the United Nations disarmament machinery by showing that progress is indeed possible.

There is no chance that disarmament will cease to be a priority for an overwhelming majority of Member States and billions of people in civil society around the world. It is an issue that Dag Hammarskjöld called a "hardy perennial" at the United Nations in 1955. Expectations for progress are high and continue to grow.

The Commission now has a chance to rise to meet those expectations. By adopting a new three-year deliberative agenda, it can collectively cast its vote for multilateralism, for disarmament as an essential means for strengthening international peace and security and for the United Nations as an indispensable common forum for the pursuit of common interests. For even despite the undeniable progress that has been made in the past three decades, there obviously remains much important work to do.

Key treaty regimes still fall short of universal membership. Some tens of thousands of nuclear weapons reportedly still exist, sustained by long-term modernization plans and large budgets. The international

rule of law has been unevenly developed in certain fields, including nuclear weapons, conventional arms and long-range missiles. Unresolved nuclear-weapon proliferation concerns continue to foster instabilities in the Middle East, South Asia and North-East Asia.

It is my great hope that, today, the Commission will start a new phase in its evolution within the United Nations disarmament machinery, an era in which compromise is possible on means but not on fundamental principles and ends, an era identified by its high level of multilateral cooperation in addressing common interests and an era known for the fulfilment of hopes rather than the aggravation of fears. I wish the Chair and all the members of the Commission well in their deliberations and look forward to contributing in any way I can to their success.

The Chair: I thank High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane for her very thoughtful insights on the issues. I assure her that we will take consider them with the seriousness that they deserve.

I shall now make a few comments with respect to the session we begin today.

We are meeting today in a new session of the Disarmament Commission, in an exercise which we hope will have the success that all of us wish for. The Disarmament Commission is one of the most important components of the disarmament machinery and should be a cornerstone for reasonable deliberation and proposals for the universal system for disarmament, peace and development. I am convinced that, with the support of all participants here today, that aspiration of the international community can be fulfilled.

A few days ago, I sent a letter with my comments on the challenge we are facing today in beginning the new cycle of the Disarmament Commission. During the informal consultations process that I organized with each of the regional groups and with some countries on a bilateral basis, I was very frank and transparent when it came to the ideas that, as the Chair at the current session of the Disarmament Commission, I believe could lead us to success.

I pointed out that we could not continue to postpone specific results or consider that the Disarmament Commission could continue with the attitude of business as usual. I believe that the time has come for the international community, as represented in this forum, which itself represents the desires and interests

of all of the States Members of the United Nations, to take substantive steps in the area of disarmament. In that respect, I conveyed in a transparent and cordial but firm fashion comments and proposals that could serve as an initial basis for building concrete results.

With reference to the first point of the agenda for the new cycle, I suggested items pertaining to nuclear disarmament. After listening informally to the opinions I received from the most diverse interest groups in the Commission, I would like to say that that topic should be considered and evaluated and that we should recommend the establishment of a necessary framework in order to identify and achieve a world without nuclear weapons, that is, effective disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation.

From my personal point of view, I believe that the second item proposed, on the legacy and lessons learned in nuclear-weapon-free zones, is of great importance. For all that it implies, the firm political decision of States to reject within their respective territories the testing, use, manufacture, acquisition, reception, storage, installation or placing or any type of possession of all nuclear weapons, would make nuclear-weapon-free zone regimes the ideal situation that the international community should adopt. I am convinced that that important legacy will also be taken into consideration in the deliberations on the nuclear issue that I proposed.

With respect to conventional weapons, in my letter I reiterated that that very important matter is being addressed and negotiated in different forums other than the Disarmament Commission. I am convinced that the second Review Conference of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects will achieve the results that we all hope for that type of weapon. In that respect, in line with the majority opinion of the Commission, I would like to suggest that the item on conventional weapons be dealt with in a general fashion in this forum. It is obvious that, if this suggestion is approved, the debate on the agenda item referring to conventional weapons should necessarily focus on deliberations on that type of weapon.

Within that framework, of special importance are confidence-building measures that the Disarmament Commission can present for due analysis and negotiation in other corresponding forums.

As I take up the difficult but not impossible assignment as Chair, I feel honoured professionally, and

my country, Peru, is honoured as well. I would like to offer the Commission the best of my experience in the area of nuclear and conventional disarmament. As I said in my letter, we do not have to reinvent the wheel; all we have to do is get it rolling, with a deep conviction that the results that the Commission will achieve will depend solely on the willingness of Member States, the flexibility they show in striving to achieve the goals, and the common efforts that will be necessary to resolve the stalemate that the Disarmament Commission has found itself in for 12 years.

I cannot conclude my brief statement without reading out a few paragraphs from a document I found in the 1970s that a group of nuclear scientists from around the world wrote with respect to the danger that nuclear weapons represent and the need to achieve disarmament and effective nuclear non-proliferation. They described a nuclear explosion that, fortunately, we have not seen since 1945.

“The immediate physical effects of nuclear strikes would be massive explosions and fires. An attack on cities and military facilities would lead to hurricane-strength winds and firestorms that would affect entire continents. The nuclear explosions would release not only their own radiation, but also radiation from any nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons destroyed in the attack. Those who did not perish immediately, engulfed in the gigantic conflagration, destroyed in the explosion or asphyxiated in underground shelters, would find themselves wandering a nightmare world populated by the dead, the wounded and the insane. Food, harvests and soil would be contaminated. Water would be rendered undrinkable. Hospitals, communications and transportation networks would have been destroyed.

“In the stillness of this dying planet, radiation would permeate the oceans and rise into the atmosphere, thinning the ozone layer and unleashing dangerous ultraviolet rays. Once this had destroyed all remaining animal life, ecological collapse would lead to desolation on a global scale: a desert world.”

We hope that neither we nor future generations will ever witness such a scenario. We must get to work, dear friends, for a world that is better for the present and future of humankind.

As members may recall, at our organizational meeting held on 19 January 2012, the Commission took

note of the provisional agenda for the substantive session of 2012, as contained in document A/CN.10/L.67, in the understanding that the agenda would be revised and formally adopted after consensus was reached on its items, in particular items 4 and 5. I have been informed that that we still have not achieved the necessary consensus on the issue and that we need additional informal consultations.

As a result, with members' permission, I intend to suspend the meeting in order to allow the informal consultations to continue and to resume the formal work of the Commission as soon as we have achieved results. We will thus continue to hold informal consultations in this room, which we hope will be very useful and achieve positive results. I would like to thank the President of

the General Assembly and the representative of the Secretary-General for attending.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 5.50 p.m.

The Chair: As the Commission has yet to reach a consensus on the items on its provisional agenda, informal consultations will resume tomorrow morning. I would not say that it has been a wasted afternoon, because there have been lengthy and comprehensive negotiations in all the groups, and I am sure that everyone has the will to advance. Perhaps tomorrow we will come up with new, clear ideas.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.