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Official Records

Disarmament Commission

324th meeting

 Thursday, 5 April 2012, 11 a.m.
 New York

Chair: Mr. Román-Morey (Peru)

The meeting was called to order at 12.05 p.m.

Organization of work

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): This morning, I shared with interested delegations a proposal for new wording for the first item on our agenda in order to find common ground and move forward. Once again, my proposal was entirely transparent. It is my impression from first reactions that it met with considerable approval, but I would nonetheless like to hear from the Commission if there are other opinions in that regard. I will therefore open the floor to discussion of the proposal I put forward this morning.

Mr. Cassidy (Indonesia): I would first like to thank you, Mr. Chair, for your constructive efforts in giving us a proposal this morning during the informal consultations. In those consultations, the representatives of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries said that we would like to go back to our group to determine our reaction to your proposal. While we note that this proposal is based on new language and the new formulation that you have already mentioned, the group could not arrive at an agreement on how we should examine the language itself. It introduces new terminology whose meaning and implications should be clarified. Our preference would be for language that everyone can understand the implications of and how it has been previously used.

With that, Mr. Chair, NAM would like to speak once again to all our colleagues here through you. At our first meeting, NAM stated that we would like to go with last year's proposal. Of course, we then heard during the consultations that last year's proposal was unacceptable because others have said that it had already been "proven" that it would not work. This is only my second year on the Disarmament Commission, so I will take it for granted that that is true. But our proposal in this area attempted to be a middle way for all of us so that we would not have to go through what we are going through at the moment. Our proposal was our basic position, and we have tried to be flexible. We tried to have it come through you, Mr. Chair, and then it was rejected.

There are so many proposals on the table, and we know that our proposal, which we have tried to make more specific to the agenda we are seeking to achieve, could not fly. That is why we tried to come up at the beginning with something that was probably better for everybody — an agenda on which we all agree and that reflects everybody's concerns, not just the concern of a particular side.

We have also already made concessions, as have other groups, so as to have the second agenda item in the informal plenary, and we acknowledge that the other groups were also doing that. So it was in that spirit of flexibility that we put forward a proposal that everybody could live with, and that proposal is in

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last year's language. That was the only reason that we proposed it. The group directed me to present to you our forward position, Mr. Chair, and I am not giving you the forward position. Through you, I am giving you our lowest possible position, and we just cannot go lower than that.

Our forward position, as I mentioned to you this morning, is a combination of "total elimination" and "a nuclear-weapon-free world". That is our forward position. But, as I just said, I did not present that. The NAM delegations took the lowest possible position, and that is the level of flexibility that we have been trying to achieve since the beginning of this meeting, because our intention is the same as everyone else's. We want to move forward. That is why we are trying to do this.

Mr. Bravaco (United States of America): In the long hiatus since this morning, I have had the opportunity to consult with officials in my capital on your proposal, for which we thank you again, Mr. Chair. They consider it a novel wording — something they have not seen before — and there was something of a pause on that basis. But when I explained to them that this was your sincere and honest attempt yet again to bridge differences and find a way forward, and that there was nothing sinister in the wording that they should be concerned about, they indicated to me that in the interests of moving the Commission forward they were prepared to allow me to proceed and accept it, despite the fact that it is something they had not seen before. So, on that basis, I will not object to your latest proposal, Mr. Chair, as I have not objected to most if not all of your proposals over the past four days.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I have listened carefully to the explanations given by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and have heard the very positive flexibility expressed by the United States towards my proposal. At this point, I would like to present my considerations regarding the proposal.

Before we began the debate in the Commission on Monday, I took the risk — and it was a risk — of presenting my personal position on the agenda items through the letter that was distributed to all delegations to the Commission on 27 March. Although it was not my intention to make specific proposals — in fact, it had only one proposal on the nuclear issue and one for conventional weapons and the other items on an eventual agenda — I did it purely to demonstrate transparency and flexibility. I thanked all delegations that expressed

their support for the proposals, and that was how we began the debate.

As I said, I come from Peru, which is not only a developing country but one that has a long history in the area of disarmament and in fighting for the rights and interests of our countries. I did not even discuss this with the authorities in my country, because in theory I had complete independence and every freedom to make proposals with the sole goal of reaching agreement on the agenda that would allow us to begin our work.

Unfortunately my efforts, although I would not say they were useless, nonetheless did not have the expected results. This morning, as the two representatives who took the floor said, I presented new wording that I and my delegation felt provided elements that could satisfy all parties in the room, and could have allowed us to reach an agreement on an agenda and get the debate started.

For me, the most important goal is to adopt an agenda and start debating. The success of the working groups will depend on the deliberations held in each working group and in each plenary meeting with a view to reaching agreed solutions.

Finally, I would like to stress — and I do not say this with any false modesty — that I do not think that there is anyone in this room who could say that the Chair has been unfair or that he has not been balanced in terms of his proposals. I think that I personally consulted with more than half of delegations. At the end of meetings, I contacted heads of delegations — those who are friends, and those who are not — to ask for their support. I have continued putting forward proposals, but, regrettably, I have not yet found a solution as concerns our work.

It is my task and my obligation to continue to try to find ways and means of arriving at an agenda for our work. I have learned the need for patience throughout my 40-year career. All of us here are diplomats, and I think that patience is one of the virtues that we develop in this type of career, especially in connection with multilateral issues. So I will show patience once again. Once again I thank all representatives for their flexibility. I reiterate what I said yesterday: flexibility is very important when it allows us to make progress towards the same goal. If flexibility means that we go our separate ways — if one person goes right and the other left — we will never reach the same goal.

I think that once again, there is no solution other than to continue with consultations. My proposal

remains on the table. I would ask those who have not had a chance to consult with their capitals, their heads of delegation, their Permanent Representatives or the security authorities in their respective ministries, to please do so. Red lines are never completely defined until the highest authority has made a decision. I have spent a large part of my career dealing with this kind of situation, and I have always known, when in doubt, to ask those in charge. Red lines, I repeat, are not necessarily an unbreachable wall. So I would ask representatives to make additional efforts to try to come up with proposals today.

The Non-Aligned Movement has proposed that we go back to the original wording from last year. I have heard the views of other regional groups, some of which are in a position to agree to that. Once again, I ask representatives for flexibility and for support so that we can agree on an agenda and begin our work. It is the working groups that will ultimately decide what we can actually do and come up with an agenda for the second and third year of the cycle that we are beginning this year.

To that end, I pledge to representatives the greatest transparency and cooperation. I will happily provide my telephone number and my e-mail address; the Secretariat can provide it. I know that a long holiday weekend is coming up that is important to many of us for various reasons, but, having said that, I am prepared to continue working.

I hope that this explanation, unless there is a divergence of opinion, will suffice for us to continue our efforts to work together.

Mr. Langeland (Norway): I wish to thank you, Mr. Chair, for your patience and for your various recommendations, which we consider very constructive in bridging differences. Since we are in an open meeting right now, it might look to some, I would assume, slightly paradoxical that we are wrangling with some wording on an agenda item on which we should have agreed a long time ago.

Indeed, if we take General Assembly resolution 66/40, submitted by the New Agenda Coalition and entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments", that is language that many Member States accept. There is also General Assembly resolution 66/45, submitted by Japan and entitled "United action towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons".

In other words, all of us have supported resolutions in one way or the other. I know some would say that there are some caveats, that there is some language in those resolutions that explains why they can support the language in that resolution and not elsewhere, but the point is that, one way or the other, all of us have signed off on some of those formulations. It is therefore very sad that, as a deliberative body and not a negotiating body, we are wasting useful time discussing those formulations.

One possible way of doing it would be to revert to the Chair's original proposal on recommendations on nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the pursuit of a nuclear-weapon-free world, because I think that everyone has, in one way or the other, supported a resolution calling for a nuclear-weapon-free world. In addition, we all support regional nuclear-weapon-free zones, which will be inherent building blocks in the context of the overall objective of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

My delegation would therefore appeal to all representatives to show flexibility so we can start work this afternoon.

Mr. Bravaco (United States of America): Mr. Chair, I am sorry to take the floor again, but now that we have reached this point and yet another of your proposals has been rejected virtually out of hand, with, in my view, a limited amount of flexibility shown on it, I think that it is time to move on. In that spirit, my Government is prepared to demonstrate maximum flexibility yet again.

Mr. Chair, while we are disappointed that in spite of your energetic and creative efforts to move the Commission forward under an agenda item that was more focused and, in our view, had a better prospect of success, we will now be prepared, very reluctantly, to go forward on the nuclear agenda item of the last six years. We do so, as I said, with deep reluctance because of the track record of the consideration of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation under the wording of an agenda item that yielded no success. We are not sanguine about the prospects for success moving forward based on that wording, but we are highly encouraged by the fact that you, Sir, will be in the Chair, and if there is any way to move forward on these issues, I know that you will help us find the way. On that basis, I think that we should try to put all of this behind us and try to remove the blockages and the resistance to the flexibility shown by many delegations.

On that score, flexibility has been exhibited in a cross-cutting, multiregional way. There has flexibility shown across the board from every region and from many Governments. For that, the United States thanks those who have been flexible and willing to split the difference and not play the zero-sum game in our deliberations.

I think that, if you are willing, Sir, and if the Commission is willing, we can add the 2011 formulation to your paper, have the rest of the agenda proposal as it was, and move forward, focus on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and attempt to come up with a compromise on those issues, which the international community expects of us.

As for me and my delegation, we stand ready to assist you, Sir. We thank you once again for your outstanding leadership, patience and flexibility in the face of that disappointing result on your latest proposal. But now I think that, in the spirit of moving forward, we are ready to go.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to especially thank the representative of the United States. Indeed, that is clearly an extreme demonstration of flexibility since we have been aware from the outset of his very clear position of rejecting the text that had been approved earlier. A few minutes ago, the Non-Aligned Movement proposed the exact same thing.

I see that the delegation of Indonesia is asking for the floor. I hope that it is to accept that flexibility. I am prepared to get to work immediately.

Mr. Cassidy (Indonesia): I just want to make sure that my understanding is correct with regard to the flexibility demonstrated by the representative of the United States. Am I correct, Mr. Chair, that the formulation of the nuclear agenda item will be the same as it was in 2011, in last year's cycle?

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): That is what I understood from the representative of the United States, who is physically nodding in acceptance. Therefore, the text would read as follows: "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons".

Mr. Cassidy (Indonesia): The Non-Aligned Movement will fully accept the flexibility shown by my colleague from the United States. On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I would also like to commend the flexibility of my colleague and, for that very reason,

we can move on with the agenda item. Mr. Chair, we are all in your hands now.

Mrs. Mercier-Jurgensen (France) (*spoke in French*): Once again, I would like to thank you, Sir, for all of your efforts to date and for all of the formulations that you have proposed. I would like to especially thank the delegation of the United States for its most recent proposal and flexibility. I confirm that my delegation is also prepared to accept the nuclear item as it was in the 2011 formulation, and that the rest of the package that you proposed should remain the same. We are now in your hands to begin the work of this Commission.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): If there is no other additional statement to be made, I propose that we include the following items in the agenda. The nuclear item would read, "Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons". The item on conventional weapons would read, "Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons", and we would then adopt the two proposals from the Chair.

(*spoke in English*)

The addition would read, "Discussions in informal meetings on working methods of the United Nations Disarmament Commission", with the outcome document submitted by a friend of the Chair or by the Chair, as the Commission wishes, in this case, on his behalf and adopted by consensus, which is, for me, the important part. The second addition would read, "Discussions in informal meetings on elements for a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade", and the outcome document will be adopted by consensus. If that is acceptable, I shall take it that the representatives accept this proposal.

It was so decided.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

I would like to truly thank everyone for the flexibility demonstrated, which only complemented the flexibility of the Chair. Allow me to say that this was a very useful and practical exercise to understand the state of the negotiations and the state of the interests of each country involved in those issues, which are truly far-reaching.

I shall now offer a personal comment. Very early this morning, I received a phone call from an ambassador colleague of mine, who was a permanent representative here in New York some 15 years ago and is now retired.

That senior diplomat congratulated on my election to the Chair of the Disarmament Commission. He said “You” — in the plural, meaning all the members of the Commission — “have in your hands the greatest responsibility in the United Nations system.” I wanted to share that because it felt very good to receive that accolade this morning from a very knowledgeable senior diplomat, who played an important role in this Commission in the 1980s.

I would like once again to thank members for their flexibility and understanding, and assure them that the Chair will continue to work alongside them in all of the working groups and in all of the thematic meetings that we will be holding.

Now that the agenda has been adopted, I would ask the Secretary to prepare the text to be distributed this afternoon to delegations. We will then proceed by opening this afternoon’s meeting with the formal approval of those documents, although we will first hear two speakers inscribed on the list of speakers for the general debate. We shall then begin our work.

Once again, from my heart as a friend and colleague, I want to thank the members of the Commission. I

thank the representative of the United States for its last accommodation, which made it possible for all of us to make to get to work. I thank the Non-Aligned Movement for its huge efforts in endorsing various proposals that we tried to adopt. I thank the other groups, including the Europeans, who have always supported this Chair.

I have been informed that the Asia-Pacific Group has nominated Mr. Naif Bin Bandar Al-Sudairy of Saudi Arabia to guide the work of Working Group I on nuclear issues, under the item “Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons”. If there is no objection, I shall take it that it is the Commission’s wish to elect Mr. Naif Bin Bandar Al-Sudairy as Chairman of Working Group I on nuclear issues.

It was so decided.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank my friend Ambassador Al-Sudairy for his presence in this room. I know that he has come all the way from his capital city, and we now have work for him to do for the next two weeks.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.