

Remarks
by Amb. András Szabó,
President of the Conference of Disarmament,
Permanent Representative of Hungary
on the occasion of the closure of the 2002 session

Geneva, September 12, 2002

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies,

Today's plenary meeting marks the end of the 2002 session of the Conference on Disarmament. We meet just one day after the world commemorated the first anniversary of extraordinary events of September 11, 2001. This immense human tragedy had a decisive impact on the way the international community perceives the security challenges facing us.

The CD's role as the sole multilateral forum with the mandate to negotiate international legal instruments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation was also put to the test in the course of our deliberations this year. The conclusion we can draw is not unequivocal.

One can see both negative and positive elements in the CD's activities during the 2002 session. The fact that it remained idle for the fourth consecutive year is again testimony to our failure to agree on a programme of work capable of establishing an equilibrium among diverse interests and priorities. As a result, the CD has lost another year to make a substantial contribution to the strengthening of international peace and stability. The danger continues to loom over us of the marginalisation of this forum as a useful tool at the disposal of the international community to devise new norms and other measures enhancing global security.

Despite this situation, we cannot but be somewhat more optimistic than a year ago. As proof of the strengthened commitment of its member states to the revitalisation of the CD, 2002 witnessed more lively debates, and the search for a compromise has been intensified. Several new initiatives emerged, injecting new ideas to our collective thinking on a comprehensive and well-balanced programme of work.

The Conference has come very close to reaching an agreement on the establishment of three Ad Hoc Committees, namely on the issues of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; of nuclear disarmament; and of negative security assurances; as well on their respective mandates. The same applies to the appointment of Special Coordinators under agenda item 6 entitled "Comprehensive programme of disarmament", as well as under agenda item 7, "Transparency in armaments". A new proposal by the German Presidency to revisit the issue of radiological weapons in the light of the new threats, and to appoint a Special Coordinator to this end was also discussed.

As it was the case during the previous sessions, deep controversies persist over how to deal with agenda item 3 entitled "Prevention of an arms race in outer space". From the point of view of the future work of the CD, the question of whether and how quickly differences concerning PAROS can be overcome remains the critical one.

The numerous bilateral and group consultations I have conducted for the last month have indicated that among the numerous propositions submitted this year, the initiative of a group of five ambassadors provoked especially broad discussions and lent new impetus to the efforts to end the stalemate in this room. Many delegations expressed their appreciation for this initiative in their respective statements to the Plenary. Thanks to its unprecedented cross-group character and to the readiness of its authors to take on board additional new ideas, this endeavour stands out as a promising compromise package. It draws on the other widely recognised proposal contained in CD/1624, which was reaffirmed by the Conference at the beginning of the 2002 session as a basis for further intensive consultations. I encourage the Group of Five to continue their efforts with a view to evolve their initiative further.

Building on the positive trends in the life of the CD this year, the circumstances were conducive to the adoption of a forward-looking Annual Report to the United Nations General Assembly. The Report reflects the dynamism we have witnessed over the last months. It gives guidance to the current President and the incoming President on the paths they should follow in the intersessional period to prepare a smooth commencement of the 2003 session. May I express the hope that the positive developments will be appreciated also in our capitals and will have an influence on high-level bilateral meetings, the outcomes of which, in their turn, will further strengthen our work. We believe that the favourable trends should be further reinforced by the adoption of a substantive General Assembly Resolution on the Annual Report of the CD. I have started my consultations on the draft, which will be finalised in New York during the session of the First Committee.

It is my sincere hope that the momentum created this year will facilitate the work of my successor Ambassador Rakesh Sood of India whom I wish much successes in performing his duties.

In conclusion I wish to thank all delegations for their constructive attitude over the last weeks, which was instrumental in the smooth drafting and adoption of the Annual Report. I could not carry out my duties as President without the much-appreciated continued assistance of the Secretariat headed by Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I am especially indebted to Mr. Enrique Roman-Morey, Deputy Secretary-General of the CD, and to Mr. Jerzy Zalesky, Political Officer, for their untiring support. On behalf of all of us I wish to thank the interpreters for their highly professional services.

May I close these brief reflections on the state of affairs in the CD showing by no doubts some movement forward by a Chinese proverb which I find most appropriate at the present stage:

"Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid of only standing still."

I thank you for your attention.