The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairman: I declare open the 2009 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission has convened today for a brief session to deal with organizational matters, including the election of the Chairman and of other members of the Bureau for 2009.

As far as the Chairpersons of subsidiary bodies of the Commission are concerned, we intend to start consultations with regional groups as soon as items for the substantive session have been agreed upon — which is not the case today. We hope that by the beginning of the substantive session, we will be in a position to present candidates to the Commission for its approval.

I should like to remind delegates that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 52/492 of September 1998, Chairpersons will be elected for the full three-year cycle. This in turn adds to the heavy responsibility of chairing the Working Groups’ deliberations and requires a serious personal commitment on the part of future Chairpersons of those subsidiary bodies. Members may want to start to think about this.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chairman: I wish now to draw the Commission’s attention to the provisional agenda for this organizational session, as contained in document A/CN.10/L.61. It is a simple agenda, but I would ask whether members have any comments on it. There being none, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the agenda as contained in document A/CN.10/L.61.

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Chairman: In accordance with the established practice of rotation, it is the Group of Eastern European States that has the honour to nominate the candidate for the post of Chairman of the Commission for its 2009 session. I have received a note from the Chairman of that Group informing me that the Group has reached an agreement on its candidature for the chairmanship of the Commission for its 2009 session.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Estonia, Chair of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mrs. Intelmann (Estonia): In my capacity as Chair of the Group of Eastern European States for the month of January 2009, I am very pleased to endorse the candidature of Mr. Andrzej Towpik, Permanent Representative of Poland, for the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission for its 2009 session.
Ambassador Towpik has been the Permanent Representative of Poland to the United Nations since 2004, and he has had a very distinguished career as a diplomatic representative of Poland, having served as Ambassador to NATO and to the European Union, and also having served, among other places, at the Polish Mission to United Nations headquarters in Geneva. He has also held several positions at the Foreign Ministry in Warsaw. Besides being a very seasoned diplomat, Mr. Towpik is also an accomplished scholar, having obtained a doctoral degree from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow.

I am confident that Mr. Towpik is an excellent candidate for the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Estonia for the nomination of Ambassador Andrzej Towpik of Poland as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that it is the wish of the Commission to elect Mr. Andrzej Towpik as Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: On behalf of the Commission and on my own account, I have the pleasure to be the first to congratulate Mr. Andrzej Towpik, Permanent Representative of Poland, on his election to this high office. I am glad to be able to express the commonly shared view that we are looking forward to benefiting from wide experience and diplomatic skill which, as we have heard from the Permanent Representative of Estonia, he has demonstrated so ably in his previous positions. We wish him success in discharging his newly assumed important duties. For our part, we will remain at his service with support and counsel, as need be.

I now invite Mr. Andrzej Towpik to take his place at the podium and to assume the chairmanship.

Mr. Towpik (Poland) took the Chair.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: At the outset, allow me to express my gratitude to the members of the Commission for electing me as Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission and for giving me the important task of chairing this organizational session. I also want to thank previous speakers for their kind words and wishes addressed to me. I count on the support and cooperation of all member States in fulfilling the important tasks and achieving the important goals that lie before the Commission.

Before turning to the next item on our agenda, allow me to pay a well-deserved tribute to the Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission at its 2008 substantive session, Ambassador Piet de Klerk, for the guidance and leadership he provided to the Commission. My gratitude also goes to the other members of the Bureau and the secretariat for their tireless efforts. And finally, let me thank delegations for the constructive spirit and cooperation they have shown during the past year of deliberations of the Commission.

Of course, it is a disappointment for all of us that at the end of the day it was not possible to overcome a few remaining obstacles towards the successful conclusion of the Commission’s work in 2008. In fact, it is not an easy task to try to achieve a perfect balance of interests on issues that go to the core of security concepts. Despite the inability of the Commission to reach a consensus on two items, both of which are in their last year of the three-year cycle, it should be noted that as a result of three years of deliberation we came close to an agreement.

While introducing draft resolution A/C.1/63/L.48 in the First Committee (see A/C.1/63/PV.17), Ambassador Piet de Klerk, Chairman of the Commission, pointed to the positive elements attained and the overwhelming agreement among Member States on the importance of the Disarmament Commission in general and on the necessity of revitalizing its work.

That is the past. However, now I invite the Commission to look at the future. I shall make a few general observations about that future as I see it.

The 2009 international disarmament calendar contains a number of important events. The outside world — the community of nations — expects a lot from those events. That general optimism is rooted in a number of factors. Allow me briefly to draw attention to some of them.

First of all, despite the fact that the past four years have not been the easiest or most productive...
years for the international multilateral disarmament machinery, we still believe that the present international climate not only calls for urgent measures but also allows for a wide variety of undertakings in the field of disarmament. The international disarmament community has had its share of disappointments in recent years, but it has also made positive achievements of which it can be rightfully proud. We all share a vision of a more secure and peaceful world, and we have the resolve to work towards its realization.

Secondly, the inability of the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission to yield tangible results has contributed to a heightened sense of urgency on the part of the international community to reform and revitalize the disarmament machinery in such a way that it will start to adequately react and respond to emerging threats to global peace and security. That new element adds to the existing heavy responsibility, which we bear collectively and individually. What happens within these walls is not an isolated event. It is an integral part of global disarmament efforts at all levels, whether governmental or non-governmental.

Thirdly, the emergence of new kinds of threats, their rapid appearance at the forefront of the security concerns and the need to deal with them without further delay have created a new atmosphere of great expectations among politicians, disarmament professionals, non-governmental organizations, the academic community and civil society — in other words among the public at large. We hope that this general atmosphere of great expectations will positively influence the work of the Disarmament Commission in 2009.

And here I should refer to the expressions of wide support for the Disarmament Commission that came during the First Committee session from practically all delegations. Even the criticism levelled at the Commission was of a constructive nature. Nobody questioned its overall usefulness. Rather, delegations pointed to its shortcomings and spoke in a businesslike manner of ways and means to make the Commission’s work more relevant and responsive to immediate security challenges. We base our approach to the prospects for the Disarmament Commission in 2009 on the support and goodwill that have been expressed.

I now propose that we continue with the third item on our agenda, namely the election of the other officers of the Disarmament Commission for 2009.

As is the case with the Chair, the other officers of the Bureau are also elected on the basis of the established principle of rotation. Accordingly, it is the turn of the Group of Western European and other States to nominate the Rapporteur of the Commission for the 2009 substantive session.

I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cuculi (Italy): On behalf of the Group of Western European and other States, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election.

On behalf of the Chair of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of January 2009, it is my pleasure to present the endorsed candidature of Ambassador Piet de Klerk of the Netherlands for the post of Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission for 2009. I think Ambassador de Klerk is far too well known to need any further introduction, bearing in mind the excellent job he did last year as Chair of the 2008 session of the Disarmament Commission, recognized by the whole membership.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Italy for his Group’s nomination of Mr. Piet de Klerk, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations, as candidate for the post of Rapporteur of the Commission for its 2009 session.

If I hear no objection, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Piet de Klerk as Rapporteur for the 2009 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I invite Mr. Piet de Klerk to take his place at the podium. Personally, I would like to add that his election was a very good decision.

Now I suggest that we proceed to the election of Vice-Chairmen. I have been informed that consultations are still going on within the Group of African States, the Group of Asian States, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the Group of Western European and other States on possible candidates for the posts of Vice-Chairmen. We can address this issue at a later stage.
With regard to the candidate for the post of Vice-Chairman from the Group of Eastern European States, here I wish to inform the Commission that the Group has successfully concluded its consultations and has endorsed a candidate for the vice-chairmanship allocated to it.

I give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mrs. Intelmann (Estonia): I am happy to announce that the Group of Eastern European States has selected Mr. Ogtay Ismayil-Zada, representative of Azerbaijan, as the Group’s candidate for the post of Vice-Chairman of the Commission.

The Chairman: I thank the representative of Estonia for the nomination of the representative of Azerbaijan as Vice-Chairman of the Commission.

If I hear no comment, I will take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Ogtay Ismayil-Zada, representative of Azerbaijan, as Vice-Chairman of the Commission for the 2009 substantive session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: It is my understanding that consultations will continue within the other regional groups on possible candidates for posts of Vice-Chairman. As I stated earlier, we shall address that issue at a later stage.

Allow me, on behalf of the Commission, to warmly congratulate the officers who have been elected and to wish them success in discharging their duties. I am looking forward to working with them and other fellow members of the Bureau.

Review of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its sixty-third session relating to the Disarmament Commission

The Chairman: As members of the Commission are aware, the General Assembly adopted one resolution that has specific bearing on the work of the Commission. For the sake of clarity and for the benefit of members of the Commission, I would like to refer to that resolution. Resolution 63/83, entitled “Report of the Disarmament Commission”, was adopted by the General Assembly on 2 December under agenda item 91 (a). The relevant paragraphs of the draft resolution, namely, operative paragraphs 7, 8 and 9, read as follows:

“[The General Assembly recommends] that the Disarmament Commission include in the agenda of its 2009 substantive session an item entitled ‘Elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade’, in accordance with resolution 61/67;

“Also recommends that the Disarmament Commission intensify consultations with a view to reaching agreement on the remaining agenda items, in accordance with decision 52/492, before the start of its substantive session of 2009; [and]

“Requests the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2009, namely from 13 April to 1 May, and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session.”

I have just outlined the resolution which contains the mandate for the upcoming work of the Disarmament Commission.

I now open the floor to those delegations wishing to make statements or to comment on anything I have said so far.

Mr. Komárek (Czech Republic): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the countries of the European Union (EU).

First of all, we would like to express our sincere thanks to Ambassador Piet de Klerk, outgoing Chairman of the Disarmament Commission, for his tireless efforts during the previous session. We also wish to sincerely congratulate you, Ambassador Andrzej Towpik, on your election as Chairman. We are convinced that, under your wise leadership, the work of the Commission will advance. We take this opportunity to assure you of the full support of the EU countries. The EU looks forward to working closely with you to achieve a successful outcome to our proceedings. In addition, we congratulate the elected Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur and wish them every success in their endeavours.

The EU is committed to the development of an effective multilateral system of disarmament and security. The EU hopes that international organizations, regimes and treaties will play to the fullest extent their role in confronting threats to international peace and security and that every effort will be made to ensure full compliance with the obligations set out in
international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties.

It is our responsibility to take advantage of every opportunity to strengthen the disarmament machinery and to tackle challenges and emerging threats. During the previous substantive session of the Commission, the EU played a constructive role and, until the very last moment, supported efforts to build a consensus.

Similarly, the EU is willing to take an active part in the process starting today within the framework of broader efforts to tackle non-proliferation and disarmament issues. We support your proposal, Mr. Chairman, to begin consultations on an agenda for the forthcoming meetings.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we wish you full success in your future work and would like to express to you once again the full support of the EU countries.

Mr. Ruddyard (Indonesia): First of all, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau — one Vice-Chairman and the Rapporteur — who have been elected so far. In addition, I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to Ambassador Piet de Klerk and all other members of his Bureau for their efforts during the previous session, which ensured the smooth conduct of the work of the Commission in a positive atmosphere.

Furthermore, I wish to reaffirm the importance and relevance of the Disarmament Commission as the sole specialized deliberative body within the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery. I look forward to a successful session.

We would appreciate it, Mr. Chairman, if you could elaborate further on how you would like to proceed with your work during this session so that the Commission can agree on an agenda for the substantive session, which begins in mid-April. I should also like to recall that the Non-Aligned Movement has put forth its preliminary ideas regarding the agenda of the Commission. We would like to know whether other Groups would like to comment on those ideas.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Non-Aligned Movement will work constructively with you and others in ensuring a successful Disarmament Commission process.

The Chairman: I shall revert to the issue raised by the representative of Indonesia following our consideration of the next item on our agenda.

Mr. Al-Jumily (Iraq) (spoke in Arabic): Permit me at the outset to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2009 session. I would also like to congratulate the Vice-Chairman and the Rapporteur who have just been elected. My delegation expresses its readiness to fully cooperate with you in the work ahead of us during the present session.

I wish to take this opportunity to state that on 13 January my country deposited its instrument of ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

Draft provisional agenda for the 2009 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission

The Chairman: The draft provisional agenda for the 2009 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission is contained in document A/CN.10/L.62. As members can see, the provisional agenda includes one item recommended by the General Assembly in resolution 63/83, “Elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade”. Two items, namely, items 5 and 6, have been left blank, as we are facing the task of coming to an agreement on the substantive items for the forthcoming session.

Every three years, the Commission and its members are confronted with the problem of choosing substantive items for the ensuing discussions. Each time, on previous occasions, the Commission was able to overcome natural differences and adopt topics worthy of our focused attention. More often, compromise comes through a prolonged and painful negotiating process. But once in a while, life itself supplies items that are acute in nature and that do not give us the luxury of long delays. I hope that that will be the case this year. Nevertheless, I call on delegations to undertake concentrated, focused and results-oriented efforts.

In this connection, I want to thank my predecessor, Ambassador Piet de Klerk, who, with the assistance of the Bureau, conducted a round of preliminary informal consultations with representatives of the regional groups. I intend to start our consultations immediately, and I am sure that member
States will be able to agree on those items in time for the beginning of the substantive session.

If there are no further comments, I will take it that the Commission wishes to act accordingly and to take a note of the provisional agenda for the 2009 substantive session as contained in document A/CN.10/L.62, with the understanding, of course, that the agenda will be completed at a later stage and formally adopted after two substantive items are agreed upon.

*It was so decided.*

**Organizational matters**

**The Chairman:** The United Nations Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and meets annually. Its sessions are financed from regular budgets and do not require additional funding. Moreover, in accordance with decision 52/492 of 1998, the annual substantive sessions of the Commission should last three weeks. As a result, during the 2009 session, the Commission will work on the basis of our usual practice, namely a full three-week session.

With that in mind, the Secretariat has arranged that the dates for the 2009 substantive session shall be from 13 April to 1 May. The last day of the first week is Friday, 17 April, which coincides with Orthodox Good Friday, and there will be no meetings on that day. Allow me to add that these dates were chosen taking into consideration the disarmament calendar for the next year and especially the 2009 session of the Preparatory Committee for the Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference, which immediately follows the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. Delegations are kindly asked to take note of these dates.

As far as the subsidiary bodies of the Commission are concerned, I intend to discuss the issue as soon as we reach an agreement on the items of the substantive agenda. The purpose of that consultation will be to determine what subsidiary bodies there should be and how they will meet.

Let me now try to answer the question posed earlier by the representative of Indonesia. I would like to stress that we leave for further consultations the following issues: first, the completion of the substantive agenda; secondly, the decision on subsidiary bodies, which, of course, will depend upon an agreement on substantive items; and finally, election of Vice-Chairmen nominated by other groups, and elections of the Chairs of the subsidiary bodies.

My intention is to start these negotiations as soon as possible. I hope we will engage in a very fruitful discussion that will solve all of the problems that remain to be decided.

I open the floor for any other remarks related to the future work of the Disarmament Commission.

**Mr. Tarar** (Pakistan): First of all, allow me to echo other delegations in welcoming your taking the helm of the Commission, Mr. Chairman, and to express our sincere appreciation for the sterling work done by your predecessor along with his Bureau and all the dedicated members of the Secretariat.

We would like to emphasize that the lack of consensus is not attributable to a lack of efficacy or usefulness on the part of the Disarmament Commission. Rather, it is an indicator of how intractable and complex the issues at hand are. As we enter into a new year, we should be seized of this question. But in our desire to reach a conclusion we should try not to gloss over issues; nor should we try to pretend that certain differences are not there.

Having said that, I have a few queries about the provisional agenda. First of all, what would be the format of the negotiations and consultations that you intend to undertake? Are we going to have further meetings before the April substantive session? Will it be through informal contacts or through the exchange of e-mails? How is it going to be done?

The other point I want to make is that, as the representative of Indonesia pointed out, the Non-Aligned Movement has submitted certain proposals. These are not proposals that just came off the top of our heads; they were very carefully put together. But thus far, we have not seen any reaction to those proposals.

As Mr. de Klerk has been very actively consulting with various regional groups, it was our expectation that by now, we would have some idea of how other regional groupings have reacted to the proposals by the Non-Aligned Movement. Do they agree with those proposals overall? Do they want some fine-tuning or refinement? Do they reject them outright? If so, do they have any counter-proposals?
The reason I say this is based on a little experience during the previous session of the Disarmament Commission: if we keep hanging fire on these matters until April — and we will not have too much time then — then we may waste a lot of time in procedural wrangling and, first of all, deciding what we have to discuss, discussing it and then reaching a consensus, which is not all that easy to come by.

Those are just some points that we wanted to emphasize. We feel that they are important and should be kept in view.

The Chairman: In responding briefly to the comments made by the representative of Pakistan, I would like to stress that my intention is to begin consultations, as I said before, as soon as possible. My understanding is that the format of the consultations will be differentiated. Of course, we will meet first with regional groups, but if, at any stage of the discussion, we feel that we need some “informal informal” meetings, we will have them. And, of course, I and other members of the Bureau are open to any comments that delegations would like to make. So we are open to all possible forms of consultation, and we will be very happy to engage in them.

Secondly, as the representative of Pakistan correctly stated, my intention is to finish those consultations well before the beginning of the April session to ensure that the April session is devoted to very serious work, rather than to discussing issues that remain to be decided before the April session.

I see no other requests for the floor. Accordingly, it might be advisable for the Commission to conclude this organizational session in order to give the Bureau and delegations time to hold further consultations on these issues so that we can take decisions on them as soon as possible.

If there are no other pressing issues to discuss, I shall take it that it is the wish of the Disarmament Commission to conclude the 2009 organizational session and to resume the unfinished organizational business at a later stage.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: The next meeting of the Disarmament Commission, as well as its format, will be announced in the Journal of the United Nations.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.