Mr. Towpik .................................. (Poland)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Organization of work (continued)

The Chairman: I understand that the process of informal consultations has not yet been completed and that some delegations would like to continue consultations. But before I suspend the meeting, I wonder whether any delegation would like to make a statement at this stage.

I do not see anyone wishing to do so. I therefore now intend to suspend this meeting. I understand that unofficial consultations will continue. My intention is to resume the meeting at 4 p.m. We therefore have half an hour for very constructive consultations. I hope that we will have an agreement after this additional half hour.

The meeting was suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.

The Chairman: I understand that there have been some very intensive consultations in different corners of this room. I am now wondering whether there are some important communications for all of us on how we can move forward in our work. Would anyone like to take the floor? Are there any new ideas or suggestions?

Mr. Ruddyard (Indonesia): I would like to express our appreciation to all of our colleagues here today, who are showing their patience and willingness to go the extra mile to find a way to come to an agreement on the agenda.

Mr. Aly (Egypt): Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank you and colleagues who have tried to put forward some proposals for us in order to get around the situation. I think that my colleague from Indonesia spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement most eloquently, as usual, reflecting our position.

Just to simplify things and move forward towards an agreement, our discussions within the Non-Aligned Movement, as my colleague explained, reflected the fact that the problem is not in the formulation but in the very central issue of whether we would put aside the fourth disarmament decade at the end of this cycle and forget about it, or whether we would take it up to do some conclusive work on it. That remains the key question. Most of the formulations put forward are ones that either aim at introducing ambiguity or build
on a questionable or debated interpretation of resolution 61/67. At the end of the day, they do not really help the Non-Aligned Movement in its position, which was very well justified and repeatedly explained by my colleague from Indonesia and which, at the end of the day, do not do justice to the United Nations Disarmament Commission as an institution or as an organ.

The problem is that if the acceptance of an agenda would actually guarantee at the end of the day on a practical level that the consideration of elements on that agenda would be inconclusive, that is not a goal we should aim for. Rather, we should strive for a more positive spirit — a spirit of trust that if the first item we agreed to in the organizational session can be concluded this year, it will be concluded this year, and we can move on to item 3 at the next session. That is the position of the Non-Aligned Movement. There is nothing wrong in it. To a great extent, it very much coincides with the other side’s view.

Thus, my appeal, as the representative of Egypt, is one that would again thank you, Mr. Chairman, as well as our other colleagues who are also trying to resolve this issue, but also one that would ask colleagues who do not see the Non-Aligned Movement proposal as good for them to give it another thought and look at its merits. It covers a very important element that is not reflected in the other proposal: that when we take up an agenda item we do it well and conclude it positively to fulfil the mandate of resolution 61/67.

Mr. Belaoura (Algeria) (spoke in French): I too would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for all your efforts to guide our work towards an agreement on the agenda. I would also like to thank all delegations that have endeavoured to work towards that end through the various proposals that have been made.

I would first of all like to reiterate that we fully associate ourselves with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), whose position we share. As has been repeatedly stressed, that position is well-grounded, balanced and practical.

First, we have put forward a three-year agenda, in line with decision 52/492, whose subparagraph (d) states that substantive agenda items should be considered by the Disarmament Commission for three years. That is the rule. If, on the basis of consensus, the Commission reaches some other agreement, that too would be possible. Without agreement on a different period for consideration, whether one year or two, then we must revert to the decision adopted by the entire General Assembly, that is, a three-year period of consideration.

Secondly, I would like to point out that the Non-Aligned Movement is standing firm by its position, not just for the sake of doing so but because, as I have said, it has been its long-standing position. The proposal has been on the table for more than six months. It was only a few weeks ago that it elicited a response. I wish to emphasize that because we are still without an agenda today, at the opening of the session. Had this discussion taken place a bit sooner, we could have saved time.

Thirdly, I should like to recall that resolution 61/67 contains a mandate for the Commission to prepare elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade. Our group still hopes that discussions on that issue can produce results, and will do everything possible to ensure such an outcome at the 2009 session. However, the group would also like to ensure that, if discussions are not successful this year, we will have an opportunity to continue them in the first half of next year. That is of crucial importance for our group.

In our search for consensus, our last proposal, which is currently before the Commission, is the outcome of discussions among 118 countries. As the Commission can imagine, in practical terms, that was no easy task. But it is a proposal that takes into account the whole host of concerns expressed not only by the members of the non-aligned group but also by other delegations. Only one delegation still has a problem in agreeing to the agenda. We hope that the proposal now before us will be the subject of a second, more positive, look, so that we will be able to reach agreement.

I wanted to make those points to illustrate, as the representative of Indonesia has already said, that our group has demonstrated its flexibility and that it wants a reliable, practical and definitive agenda.

Mr. Tarar (Pakistan): As usual, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, for the very valiant effort you have made to try to steer these proceedings towards consensus.
First of all, we would like to fully align ourselves with the group position of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was so ably enunciated by the representative of Indonesia. We do not want to rehash everything that has been said about the merits of the NAM position. Suffice it to say that, when something has been so painstakingly, carefully and deliberately put together over several months, it is rather painful to see it being sort of brushed aside.

We in the Non-Aligned Movement are not averse to logic. We do not want to just stick to our position. But we are still waiting for the golden convincing argument that will make us realize the folly of our ways. We have not seen that. What we have seen is what a cynic would describe as a knee-jerk instinctive reaction or opposition to something that has been very carefully put together. Allow me to elaborate a little on that concept.

As the Commission is aware, there is a multiplicity of views within the Non-Aligned Movement. We too have had some divergence of opinion on the question of conventional weapons. But we managed to put together a position that was acceptable to countries that feel very passionately about the issue, as well as to countries for which it may not be as pressing a priority as it should be. Having done that, we were very optimistic that the problem would be resolved. However, that was not the case.

What we are looking at right now is the prospect of these proceedings dragging on for another few days, and then maybe people will graciously agree to some sort of an agenda. That would translate into us having already lost perhaps three days. I am just speaking in hypothetical terms. When we start with our formal statements, it would amount to 800 minutes. That would be another three days gone. We will then have the inevitable objection about resolution 61/67 being time-bound, and so on and so forth.

We would therefore like to urge some delegations that have reservations about the NAM position to kindly take another look. It is a well-formulated position and it takes all concerns on board. Still, we would have been very willing to revise our position if we had encountered any reasonable argument.

Mr. Al-Ansari (Qatar) (spoke in Arabic): I should like to thank you, Sir, for your ongoing efforts to coordinate the various points of view expressed in this room. We hope that we can ultimately reach a consensus that will allow us to do our work in the optimal manner and achieve the best possible results. Our difficulties will not prevent us from congratulating you on your assumption of the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. We wish you every success in your work.

I wish to associate my position with that presented by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). I would remind all participants in this meeting that NAM has previously outlined its position vis-à-vis the Commission’s agenda for this year and has presented it in writing to the Chairman. Representatives of a number of member States have seen that written proposal, but we have received no response in writing, indicating that reservations remain in its regard. In that paper, we invited members to begin negotiations in good faith with the aim of reaching a consensus on this year’s agenda. We did not expect to encounter such a strong lack of consensus, which must be taken into account.

For instance, we could pursue manoeuvres at this session and resort to our legitimate right to introduce a draft resolution to the First Committee altering the prior terms of reference. We have the votes necessary to adopt such a draft resolution, but I believe that NAM attaches great importance to compromise and transparency in its eagerness to find consensus. That is why we presented our written proposal.

In the circumstances, we should prioritize two aspects. The first, of course, is reaching understanding among all our colleagues who hold points of view that diverge from NAM’s. We find ourselves in a new era in which we have seen strong indications that consensus is achievable among all parties with regard to the importance of supporting a plurality of views in the United Nations on disarmament issues, and that members are ready to renew their interest in nuclear non-proliferation issues. We should take advantage of those encouraging signals and translate them into tangible results. We therefore attach great importance to our colleagues’ understanding of this matter. Secondly, we should pursue the good-faith endeavours of all parties.

In conclusion, I would stress the fact that, when based on flexibility anchored in fairness, good intentions are a solid foundation for achieving
consensus. All we need do is implement resolution 61/67. Many people outside the Disarmament Commission are discussing the possibility of our failure here, and we hope that other delegations will see that. We have great respect for all parties in this room and appreciate their points of view. As we are most eager to succeed in our work, I will not go on, except to say that we wish every success to the Commission under your leadership, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) (spoken in Arabic): At the outset, I should like to thank you, Sir, and all our colleagues for their efforts to present proposals with the aim of agreeing an agenda for the Disarmament Commission.

I associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In that regard, I would remind some of my colleagues here today that NAM has shown great flexibility on the matter of the agenda. There is no need for me to repeat the statement made by my Indonesian colleague.

I should, however, like to make the following comment. NAM has made its opinion known since October 2008 and submitted it yet again in February this year. Seeking to be flexible, we took into account the concerns of our colleagues regarding confidence-building measures, but we note that our flexibility was not reciprocated. We hope that our colleagues who still have reservations will reconsider NAM’s proposals.

The Chairman: I would like to make several points.

First, I would like to thank all delegations for their efforts to find a compromise solution and to explain their positions. Secondly, the problem we are facing is that we still do not have an agenda for this session. Thirdly, this means that we do not have a key for our further work. We cannot start the general exchange of views because the exchange is connected to the items on the agenda, and we cannot establish working groups, which are also connected to the agenda. Fourthly, I understand that everyone feels the urgency of the situation. However, my impression is that we will not find a solution this afternoon, whether we continue our work in formal or informal meeting.

Therefore, my intention is to adjourn the meeting. The next meeting of the Commission will be held tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. I hope that, at that time, we will have new ideas that will help us to solve the problem.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.