Chairman: Mr. Towpik ........................................ (Poland)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Organization of work (continued)

The Chairman: We shall now proceed with the election of a new member of the Bureau. As members will recall, the Commission is still to elect the Vice-Chairpersons from the Group of African States, the Group of Asian States and the Group of Western European and other States.

I want to inform the Commission that the Group of Western European and other States has nominated Mr. Serge Bavaud of Switzerland for the post of Vice-Chairman of the Commission. If I hear no objection I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Bavaud as Vice-Chairman.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Allow me on behalf of the Commission and the members of the Bureau to warmly congratulate the newly elected member of the Bureau and to wish him success in discharging his duties.

We still have to finalize consultations in the regional Groups with regard to the candidatures of Chairmen of Working Groups. This is rather urgent, considering that the first meetings of the Working Groups are scheduled for today in the afternoon. If candidates are not chosen at this morning’s meeting, we will have to cancel this afternoon’s meetings. In that case, the work of the Working Groups will start at 10 a.m. on Monday, 20 April.

General exchange of views (continued)

Mr. Hill (Australia): The United Nations is one of the key pillars of Australian foreign policy and, as a long-standing supporter of multilateral approaches to disarmament and non-proliferation, we look forward to this session of the Disarmament Commission engaging in substantive, proactive and creative debate.

Since our last session, Australia and Japan established the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. The Commission — an independent global panel co-chaired by former Australian Foreign Minister Mr. Gareth Evans and former Japanese Foreign Minister Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi — aims to reinvigorate the global effort to curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to secure further advances in nuclear disarmament.

Through the credibility of its membership, the quality of its arguments and the effectiveness of its advocacy, the Commission is seeking to bring a fresh and imaginative vision. The Commission does not underestimate the magnitude of the tasks it faces, but the many positive reactions it has received suggest that there is considerable international support for a recommitment to a world free of nuclear weapons and for practical ways to address the challenges of non-proliferation.

We are disappointed, therefore, that member States could not agree to invite Mr. Evans and Ms. Kawaguchi to address this body. The Co-Chairs had been advised that the Disarmament Commission was a significant part of the multilateral machinery for
disarmament; that is unfortunately undermined by this disappointing outcome. This body should be encouraging open dialogue that can facilitate creative thinking, especially as we move towards the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Australia warmly welcomes United States President Obama’s commitment to pursuing the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. We strongly support his commitment to seeking United States ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and to pursue negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty. Equally, we welcome the announcement by President Obama and Russian President Medvedev that they intend to pursue a legally binding, verifiable successor treaty to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

These developments, combined with the initiatives announced by France and the United Kingdom to reduce further their nuclear arsenals, augur well for nuclear-weapon State commitment to the NPT. However, there is more that the nuclear-weapon States can do. As a starting point, they must show leadership at the forthcoming NPT Preparatory Committee meeting and reaffirm their disarmament commitments under article VI.

All Member States must recognize the collective security benefits provided by the Treaty — the near universal commitment not to acquire nuclear weapons and the only binding commitment made by possessors of these weapons to relinquish them. All States must comply with their obligations under the Treaty. I therefore join other delegations in condemning strongly the recent launch by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. Australia endorses the presidential statement recently and unanimously adopted by the Security Council. We call on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to return to compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions and the presidential statement and to work to address international concerns about its missile and nuclear programmes. In particular, we urge the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to work constructively with other members of the Six-Party Talks to realize the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

It would be remiss not to highlight the continuing emphasis Australia places on addressing the challenges of conventional weapons, including the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons. In addition to adopting national measures to curb proliferation, we continue to provide practical assistance to affected States, especially in our region. Cooperation at the international level, including through the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, is essential if we are to stem the flow of illicit weapons.

Australia believes that the irresponsible or illicit transfer of conventional arms and their components is of such grave and pressing concern that it can be adequately addressed only through the establishment of a legally binding treaty. We were proud to be one of the co-authors of the General Assembly resolution on an arms trade treaty. We took our place on the Group of Government Experts with enthusiasm and purpose and are now applying ourselves to supporting progress in the Open-ended Working Group.

Australia and the Republic of Korea have also jointly promoted action in the General Assembly to alert member States to the proliferation threat presented by illicit brokering of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems and conventional arms.

The issues discussed in this forum therefore bear on the security interests of all States. The global mood is swinging back to nuclear disarmament and the Disarmament Commission should not waste this opportunity to make practical contributions to address contemporary challenges.

Mr. Moreno Fernández (Cuba) (spoke in Spanish): On behalf of the Cuban delegation, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission. We commend in particular your valiant efforts to achieve consensus on the Commission’s agenda. I extend our congratulations to the other members of the Bureau.

Cuba fully supports the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

While we speechify and assert our commitment to peace and disarmament, the reality outside this room is of an altogether different nature. In the midst of an economic crisis affecting the entire world, military expenditures, rather than falling, increase at an accelerated rate year after year. The record figure of
$1.339 trillion for military expenditures — 45 per cent higher than that of a mere 10 years ago — has now been set.

While resources are spent in this manner, the modest Millennium Development Goals continue to be an unattainable dream for the vast majority of people because more than 100 countries of the South do not and will not have the $150 billion — a mere 10 per cent of the money spent for military purposes — necessary to attain them. With the resources spent on weaponry, we could feed the world’s 852 million hungry people for a year. We could also provide decent housing for the more than 640 million children who are today without a roof over their heads, while the 115 million who cannot attend primary school could do so.

Cuba believes that it is high time to set aside the hollow rhetoric and to keep forgotten promises. Cuba once again reiterates its proposal that at least half of current military expenditures be allocated to addressing economic and social development needs by way of a fund that would be administered by the United Nations.

Recent years have been characterized by the paralysis of the multilateral disarmament agenda. The Disarmament Commission has not been unscathed by these noxious effects. It is a cause for concern that, for many years now, the Commission has achieved no concrete results.

The possibility of changing things and beginning to take steps forward is in our hands. Seeking to be brief, I will refer only to the two substantive items of the agenda that will be considered in 2009. When the time is right, we will express our positions on the item on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons.

We welcome the fact that the Commission will give continuity in the 2009-2011 cycle to the item entitled “Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation of nuclear weapons”. There are some 25,000 nuclear weapons around the world, 10,200 of which are ready for immediate use. The mere existence of these weapons and the doctrines that prescribe their possession and use constitute a grave danger to international peace and security. Cuba reiterates its full support for the historic position of the Non-Aligned Movement that nuclear disarmament is and should continue to be the highest priority in the disarmament field.

The importance of nuclear disarmament cannot be ignored or minimized. Nuclear-weapon States have the legal obligation not merely to hold but also to conclude negotiations aimed at attaining complete nuclear disarmament under a strict and effective system of international verification.

Cuba categorically rejects the selective implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The obligations assumed in the area of nuclear disarmament and the peaceful use of the nuclear energy cannot continue to be perpetually set aside within the framework of the Treaty. It is essential that the 2010 NPT Review Conference achieve concrete results, and that will depend to a large extent on what happens at the third session of the Preparatory Committee within a few days. We support the priority conclusion of a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument on security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States.

Cuba believes that a fourth disarmament decade would play an important role in the galvanization of international efforts to respond to current and emerging disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation and international security challenges. We are sure that the Disarmament Commission will be able to submit to the General Assembly a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade that would appropriately reflect the priorities that we, the States, have established in this field.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to reiterate the Cuban delegation’s full support in the discharge of your duties.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran congratulates you, Sir, on assuming the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission, and pledges its cooperation in the important deliberations that lie ahead. I am sure that, under your skilful stewardship, we will be able to have a successful session.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We are pleased that the Commission has commenced the first year of its new cycle with an agreed substantive agenda, including an item on
nuclear disarmament, which remains at the top of the agenda for three years. This is a testament to the priority and urgency the international community gives to addressing the threat posed by the continued existence of thousands of nuclear weapons in the nuclear-weapon States’ stockpiles.

The Commission provides us with a very good opportunity to express our views on the noble goal of nuclear disarmament of which, for almost four decades, the international community has awaited the realization. It also offers us a chance to review the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and to work on recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects.

With the end of the cold war, the international community rightly expected the nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their responsibilities and commitments to seriously pursue the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The international community has the right to be assured that the nightmare that was visited upon the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will never happen again. Regrettably, the limited efforts of the major nuclear-weapon States after the cold war to reduce their arsenals have faced serious setbacks, particularly in recent years.

With the adoption of anti-nuclear disarmament policies by some nuclear-weapon States during the course of the past several years, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is today facing serious challenges. Certain nuclear-weapon States have disregarded or reinterpreted their nuclear disarmament obligations, attempted to relegate the status of nuclear disarmament on the international security agenda, and sought to block progress in disarmament machinery, even in this Commission, which does not negotiate legally binding agreements.

Contrary to their commitments, the same States have emphasized the role of nuclear weapons in their military doctrines and described them as life insurance. Such negative trends have done a serious disservice to the cause of a world without nuclear weapons. As a result, norms and principles of nuclear disarmament laid down by the Final Document of the first special session on disarmament, the NPT and its 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences are at risk. We hope that our deliberations in this Commission will contribute to upholding those norms and principles.

The NPT is the foundation of nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We have a collective responsibility to restore the credibility of the NPT. To realize this objective, we need to address the aforementioned challenges collectively. If the NPT is to endure, it is necessary that the nuclear-weapon States prove that they are serious about their commitments to fully implementing the provisions of the NPT and all three decisions and the resolution of the 1995 Review and Extension Conference and the agreements of the 2000 Review Conference. Failure to do so would lead to a dangerous build-up of dissatisfaction among a majority of Treaty parties. The international community requires the nuclear-weapon States to build confidence and consolidate their commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Recent talk and news regarding promises by some nuclear-weapon States to change course from their previous approach reflect a necessary step in the right direction, but it is not adequate. We hope that they put their words into action.

Non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, as recognized by the NPT, are of high importance. These issues should be considered on their own merit, with due attention to the rights and obligations of States parties under the relevant provisions of the NPT. Unfortunately, non-proliferation has been manipulated by a few countries as an excuse to advance their narrow national interests and to deprive the developing countries of their right to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Thus, the Commission needs to reflect on non-proliferation in all its aspects and recommend certain measures to ensure the critical balance between non-proliferation obligations and the right to access nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly believes that non-proliferation and disarmament are mutually reinforcing. Iran, as the initiator of the push for a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, fully supports genuine efforts aimed at curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Iran was among the first countries that ratified the NPT and concluded the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), thereby putting its facilities under the Agency’s supervision. Iran has also ratified other treaties that
prohibit the development and use of weapons of mass
destruction.

In this context, while I have the floor, I would
like to address the statement made yesterday by the
representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the
European Union regarding Iran’s nuclear programme.
A reasonable observer will quickly realize that claims
of Iran’s so-called proliferation threat are politically
motivated. IAEA has repeatedly confirmed that Iran’s
nuclear programme remains dedicated to peaceful use.
In practising its legitimate right to develop nuclear
energy technology in accordance with the NPT, the
position of the Islamic Republic of Iran is clear. Iran
has always maintained its need for nuclear power as an
alternative source of energy to supply its booming
population and rapid development. Iran encourages
dialogue and constructive cooperation based on
respect, justice and the rights of nations. In this
respect, we are prepared to engage in serious
negotiations with interested parties. At the same time,
we believe that any political game of double standards
and nuclear and scientific apartheid is unacceptable.

I would like to briefly touch on the second item,
namely, the declaration of the fourth disarmament
decade. We are of the view that pursuing a practical
approach to the development of elements of the
declaration would facilitate the successful conclusion
of this item. A concise declaration based on existing
principles, instruments and agreements is an option
worth considering.

Mr. Hassan (Sudan) (spoke in Arabic): I would
like at the outset to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on
your election to preside over the Disarmament
Commission. Through you, I would also like to
congratulate the other members of the Bureau. We are
confident of your wisdom and experience, which we
had a chance to witness over two days of intensive
informal consultations on the agenda for our session.
We know that your skills and this proof of your
capacity to ensure that our work is crowned with
success at this important session will yield tangible
results through this important disarmament mechanism.
The delegation of the Sudan would therefore like to
reaffirm its full support for your efforts and those of
Mr. Sergio Duarte, High Representative for
Disarmament Affairs.

My country’s delegation also fully subscribes to
the statement that will be made by the representative of
Jordan on behalf of the League of Arab States and to
those made by the representative of Indonesia on
behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the
representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African
Group.

The Sudan reaffirms the importance of the critical
role being played by the Disarmament Commission as
a specialized technical body authorized to engage in
objective and constructive negotiations to produce
practical and binding decisions in order to rouse the
disarmament mechanism from its current lethargy. This
is particularly true regarding non-proliferation efforts
and efforts for the reduction of nuclear weapons. This
is the result of the high priorities agreed on in all
multilateral forums.

As you are aware, Sir, the Review Conference of
the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of
Nuclear Weapons (NPT) will be held next year.
Unfortunately, however, participants in that important
event will have to note that this key Treaty, the
cornerstone of non-proliferation, remains inactive as a
result of the refusals of the nuclear Powers to abide by
its most important provisions. Those Powers indeed
continue their frenzied efforts to further develop their
nuclear arsenals instead of reducing and eliminating
them.

The delegation of the Sudan reaffirms that the
importance of the NPT would be enhanced by the
scrupulous implementation of resolution 50/66 on the
establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the
Middle East, first adopted by the General Assembly in
1995, when all of the Arab countries expressed their
support for it. Under that resolution, a nuclear-weapon-
free zone could be created in the Middle East were it
not for the intransigence and dogged refusal of Israel to
adhere to the NPT and to submit its nuclear
programmes and facilities to the global monitoring
regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency.
This is endangering international and regional security.
In a region as complex as the Middle East, this is
dangerous.

We reiterate our appeal to those States that have
not yet ratified the Pelindaba Treaty, which declared
Africa a nuclear-weapon-free zone, to do so
immediately in order for the Treaty to enter into force.
We would also like to reaffirm the unconditional right
of all States to use nuclear energy for peaceful
purposes by putting it to research use.
This substantive session of the Disarmament Commission should now go to work on the elements for a declaration of the fourth disarmament decade. We reaffirm here the importance of attaching high priority in the declaration to implementing our common goal of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, conventional weapons and small arms and light weapons. The declaration must also reaffirm the need to settle disputes and conflicts through peaceful, political means by easing hotbeds of tension throughout the world in order to achieve the desired goals.

The Sudan was one of the first countries to adhere to international instruments and treaties in the area of disarmament, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We have also played an important regional role in promoting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In that regard, Khartoum hosted the first Regional Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties in Africa, as well as a conference urging that Africa be declared a chemical-weapon-free zone. Furthermore, the Sudan was one of the first countries to accede to the Hague Code of Conduct.

With regard to small arms and light weapons, the delegation of the Sudan considers that term paradoxical, given the magnitude and breadth of the damage caused by such weapons in African countries experiencing internal conflict and internecine fighting. The Sudan attaches the utmost importance to combating the illegal circulation of small arms and light weapons. That is why we were among the first countries to ratify the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, and have played an effective role in the conferences and workshops held in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Cairo, Jordan and Algeria to strengthen regional cooperation with a view to its implementation.

In addition to the Sudan’s regional and international contributions towards combating the spread of small arms and light weapons, the Sudan has played a role at the national level through its national office to combat the spread of such weapons. In that regard, the State has adopted the necessary national legislation and has begun to assume control over the possession of such weapons because of their close link to transnational organized crime. That is why the Sudan has also been considering the issue of the control of its borders with neighbouring countries in order to tighten monitoring and surveillance to prevent the export of such weapons to non-State actors.

**Mr. Terzi di Sant’Agata** (Italy): As this is the first time that I have taken the floor at this session, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for this year. In that endeavour, you can rely on my delegation’s unwavering support.

I would like to fully subscribe to the statement made by the Czech presidency of the European Union. However, I would like to make a few additional remarks in my national capacity, in particular regarding a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT).

My country looks forward to the early commencement of negotiations, without preconditions, on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. In that regard, we have noted with appreciation that no objection has been raised in principle to the launching of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a verifiable FMCT.

Finally, my country welcomes the support for an FMCT expressed in the recent joint statement by the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States.

**Mr. Al-Allaf** (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Group of Arab States, I am pleased to congratulate you, Sir, on the confidence placed in you through your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2009 session. We hope that your chairmanship will meet with every success. That hope has already been realized in the success of your efforts to arrive at an agenda by consensus, which enabled the Commission to begin its work without further delay. Our congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau — the Vice-Chairs and the Rapporteur — for the present session.

The Arab Group fully aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In recent decades, great international concern has arisen at the increasing threat posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This has manifested
itself in selective and unfair policies leading to the accumulation of vast stockpiles of such weapons, in addition to the development of lethal weapons in more than one country, in total disregard of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Despite the Treaty’s indefinite extension in 1995, what has really been extended is its shortcomings, represented in its lack of effectiveness in terms of nuclear disarmament, the use of double standards with regard to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the efforts made to restrict the right of non-nuclear States to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and other nuclear applications for development and scientific progress.

In addition to the fact that the implementation of the NPT has thus far been incomplete or utterly lacking, the Arab Group is particularly concerned at the total lack of implementation in the Middle East, by Israel and by the three depositaries of the NPT, which are parties to the treaty and which were sponsors of the Middle East resolution.

The Arab Group welcomes the recent positive statements made by leaders of some nuclear-weapon States indicating their commitment to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons and to make international efforts to move forward from nuclear non-proliferation to nuclear disarmament. The Group hopes that those statements will be translated into reality in the form of actions and resolutions aimed at promoting change in the area of nuclear disarmament, strengthening the credibility of the non-proliferation regime and implementing the NPT, thus contributing to the achievement of regional and international peace and security.

It seems that some nuclear-weapon States do not take their nuclear disarmament commitments seriously, but rather are violating their international commitments in the area of nuclear proliferation and totally ignoring the commitments that they made to non-nuclear States. The clearest evidence of this distortion is the fact that some nuclear States continue to engage in nuclear cooperation with Israel and, graver still, that certain NPT States parties have granted exemptions to States non-parties without having the legal authority to make such unilateral decisions. That runs counter to their commitments under the Treaty, the decisions taken at NPT Review Conferences and the indefinite extension of the Treaty.

The credibility of some international parties is being seriously undermined by their negligence in following up the decisions and outcomes of the previous NPT Review Conferences and their attempts to apply double standards with respect to compliance. I refer in particular to the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. Here I recall that the indefinite extension of the NPT would not have been agreed by consensus had it not been for the adoption of that resolution, which calls for the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

But the Middle East remains a flagrant example of the Treaty’s shortcomings in effectively achieving security, because it is the only region in the world that has not seen concrete international efforts to cleanse it of nuclear weapons. That encourages Israel to acquire nuclear military capacity free from international verification, inspection or supervision. Here, we warn of the threat posed by international silence in the face of Israel’s position on the nuclear issue, which has moved from vagueness to an explicit declaration of the possession of nuclear weapons. The response of the international community is a surprising silence and even sponsorship of this strange situation, which has persisted for too long, which has caused the peoples of the region to lose their faith in the idea of nuclear non-proliferation and which has fuelled the resumption of the arms race, in spite of its negative implications for international peace and security.

Despite successive consensus General Assembly decisions and resolutions on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region of the Middle East and other relevant Assembly resolutions affirming the gravity of Israeli nuclear armament, and despite the fact that on 29 December 2003 the Arab Group submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council (see A/58/667) calling for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from the region, in particular nuclear weapons, to date, unfortunately, no concrete action has resulted from those resolutions.

The Arab Group supports genuine movement towards concrete implementation of the 13 practical steps defined at the 2000 NPT Review Conference and a commitment to verifiable, irreversible reductions in nuclear arms, to be carried out within an international multilateral framework. At the same time, we affirm the need for a binding legal regime of security guarantees for non-nuclear States with respect to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against them.
Moreover, the Arab Group affirms that the right of States to acquire nuclear technology and harness it for peaceful purposes is inalienable, in accordance with article IV of the NPT. The only way to achieve the universality of the Treaty and avert the threat of nuclear proliferation is through accession by all States and through their implementation of article III, which calls upon States parties to conclude comprehensive safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

All States in the Middle East have acceded to the NPT — with the exception of Israel, which is the only State in the region to possess a military nuclear capability. The international community must understand the concerns of the peoples of the region regarding the threat posed by Israel’s military nuclear capability, which has been acknowledged in numerous reports by the international community and by the relevant international forums, as well as in Security Council resolutions, foremost among them Council resolution 487 (1981), which explicitly called upon Israel to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of IAEA. The Agency has been called upon to halt its scientific assistance to Israel.

Here, I note the centrality of the recent General Assembly resolution 63/84, which reaffirmed the importance of Israel’s accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the placement of all its nuclear facilities under comprehensive IAEA safeguards in realizing the goal of universal adherence to the Treaty.

I take this opportunity to recall the 30 March 2009 declaration issued by Arab leaders at the Doha summit, which is in line with Security Council resolution 487 (1981) and which explicitly calls upon the international community to act to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, from the Middle East and to hold Israel accountable with respect to signing the NPT and to placing all its nuclear facilities and activities under IAEA safeguards.

We recall that the resolution on the Middle East was adopted in the context of a comprehensive international deal agreed upon at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, which enshrines the link between the indefinite extension of the Treaty on the one hand and the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East on the other. The Arab Group stresses too that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones — such as those established by the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Bangkok and Pelindaba and the Central Asian Treaty — and the nuclear-free status of Mongolia are positive steps and important measures to promote worldwide nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

The international community is working to declare the commencement of the fourth disarmament decade, during which we will strive to build on the achievements of previous disarmament decades and to lend fresh impetus to initiatives already under way. We believe that the elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade must reflect the fact that nuclear disarmament is a clear priority in balanced, non-discriminatory international disarmament, arms limitation and non-proliferation efforts.

With respect to the agenda item entitled “Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons”, the Arab Group stresses the importance of effective measures that will help promote international peace and security while also taking into account the principles of the right of States to acquire the means of self-defence and the sovereignty of States and non-interference in their internal affairs, and taking account too of the specific security and defence characteristics of each region.

In the view of the Arab Group, confidence-building measures cannot be an alternative to or a precondition for disarmament. At the same time, if they are agreed in a balanced and comprehensive manner in various regions, they can be important in creating a favourable climate for disarmament and for monitoring compliance. The Arab Group also fully supports unilateral, bilateral, regional and multilateral measures aimed at reducing military expenditures; these help promote regional and international peace and security.

The most important criterion for the credibility of practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons is fairness in the resolution of armed conflicts, leaving behind the hidden agendas of certain States that are exporters of such weapons. The situation in the Middle East may be the clearest and most important example here. The Israeli occupation of Arab lands is directly supported by certain major Powers that export conventional weapons; those States have even joined the Israeli military industries in projects to develop these technologies. This encourages
Israel not to grasp the Arab hand extended to it in peace, but rather to continue its occupation of Arab lands, its daily violations of international humanitarian law and its escalation of tension in the region.

In conclusion, the Arab Group calls for full compliance with and implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. We call for full adherence to that important programme and for comprehensive international support for it, particularly in the light of the success of the third Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the Programme of Action, held in July 2008. In our view, it is important to build on that success in order to implement the programme in the best possible way, both regionally and internationally.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (spoke in Spanish): The delegation of Nicaragua is pleased to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, the Vice-Chairs, the Chairs of the Working Groups and the other officers on your election to your responsible positions. Our congratulations go also to Ambassador Sergio Duarte, the Secretary-General’s High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, on his introductory remarks at the present session, which reflected the commitment of the United Nations to the disarmament agenda.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and with the statement that will be made by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. We wish also to underscore a number of matters that we consider to be of great importance.

Nicaragua reaffirms the importance and relevance of the Disarmament Commission as the sole specialized deliberative body of the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery. We stress its continued relevance, given its universality and its mandate to submit to the General Assembly recommendations on urgent disarmament matters. We call upon member States to demonstrate the political will and flexibility necessary for reaching concrete agreements during the present cycle, with a view to crafting appropriate recommendations on the items on the agenda we have adopted.

The mere existence of nuclear weapons is a matter of constant concern for the peoples of United Nations Member States, especially when combined with doctrines sanctioning their possession and use and with the lack of progress towards their complete elimination. They pose a threat to international peace and security and indeed to the very existence of humankind.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), a cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, has played a crucial role in preventing the further spread of nuclear weapons and in promoting cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy and moving towards the goal of general and complete nuclear disarmament. Despite that goal, recent information tells us that there are still more than 26,000 nuclear weapons worldwide, which hang like a sword of Damocles over the heads of all inhabitants of our planet. Non-nuclear-weapon States need adequate security guarantees from nuclear-weapon States, through a binding universal treaty, to the effect that they will not subject to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Nicaragua unambiguously stresses that the NPT must not be interpreted in any way that could infringe on the inalienable right of States parties to develop, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, without any discrimination, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaty. My Government firmly believes that the 8 July 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons continues to be of great importance in the sphere of nuclear disarmament. It clearly establishes that States have the legal obligation, under article VI of the NPT, to undertake to pursue in good faith and bring to a prompt conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects.

My delegation wishes also to stress the importance of attaining the universality of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), including accession by all nuclear-weapon States. This would contribute to the process of nuclear disarmament. We believe that, in order for all the objectives of the Treaty to be attained, the permanent commitment of all signatory States, in particular nuclear-weapon States, to nuclear disarmament is vital.

As a founding member of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established the world’s first nuclear-weapon-free zone, Nicaragua welcomes the entry into
force of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia — the Semipalatsinsk Treaty. That treaty contributes to the eventual attainment of the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

My delegation calls upon all States of the Middle East — including the sole State in the region to have declared its possession of nuclear weapons, Israel — to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone, in accordance with relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. This would help reduce tension in the region and would complement other endeavours to bring about lasting peace and security there.

Nicaragua urges all delegations to support the call of the Non-Aligned Movement for the prompt convening of an international conference to agree on a step-by-step programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, for the prohibition of their development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of use, and for their total destruction.

There have been positive signs in the sphere of international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, among them the joint statement by the Presidents of the Russian Federation and the United States of America on the attainment of a nuclear-weapon-free world and on launching negotiations on a legally binding treaty to replace the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms (START I) on its expiration.

Turning to other disarmament issues, Nicaragua shares the concerns of many other delegations concerning the proliferation of the illicit arms trade. We therefore support the prompt formulation of a binding treaty regulating all transactions among States, including exports, imports, transfers, gifts, grants, loans, leases, sales or any other transfer of conventional weapons, small arms and light weapons, ammunition, parts and delivery systems.

With the support of the United Nations Development Programme, the States members of the Central American Integration System have established the Central American Programme on Small Arms and Light Weapons Control. Its objective is to create the conditions necessary to foster and harmonize legislation for the control of small arms and light weapons in Central America, to support development, implementation and evaluation of national initiatives for the collection and destruction of small arms and to set up institutionalized actions and programmes on the national and regional level that would prevent the proliferation of small arms and their consequences, thereby contributing to the development of a culture of peace.

In conclusion, there is a close tie between development and disarmament. With just a fraction of the colossal amount of money invested in the production of new weapons and in improving those already in existence, one could eliminate the majority of curable diseases that humanity faces, achieve the goal of poverty reduction that the international community has set for itself, support the eradication of hunger and illiteracy and support official and informal efforts to overcome the current financial crisis that is choking the majority of Members of this Organization.

Ms. Rovirosa (Mexico) (spoke in Spanish): My delegation has the honour to speak on behalf of the States members of the Rio Group, namely Argentina, Belize, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Uruguay and my country, Mexico.

At the outset, Sir, the Rio Group wishes to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the 2009 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, as well as your efforts to reach an agreement on the Commission’s agenda. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau. We appreciate the participation of Mr. Sergio Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, whose message reaffirmed the strong commitment of the United Nations to the disarmament agenda.

The Rio Group welcomes the consensus reached on the substantive items on the agenda to be considered in the Commission’s 2009-2011 cycle. We believe that the agreed agenda reflects in a balanced and comprehensive way substantive priorities to be addressed in this area. Our Group reiterates its willingness to work constructively to complete the complex tasks entrusted to the Commission. We hope that this session will achieve substantive progress that will enable us to develop specific recommendations on the agenda items that we have agreed.

With regard to the topic “Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons”, the Group
reiterates its firm position in favour of nuclear disarmament. We reiterate the concern about the serious threat to humanity represented by the very existence of nuclear weapons and about the slow progress towards their total elimination.

The Rio Group welcomes some positive signs that have been witnessed recently in the international arena on disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. In this context, we hope that the recent joint statement by the Presidents of the two major nuclear Powers will be translated into concrete actions to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world and to begin negotiations on new and verifiable reductions in their nuclear arsenals, beginning with the formulation of a new legally binding treaty this year, to enter into force after the expiry of the START I treaty.

The members of the Rio Group form part of the first nuclear-weapon-free zone, which was established over 40 years ago by the Treaty of Tlatelolco. We are witnesses to the commitment and responsibility of the region with respect to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In this context, we reiterate the call to the nuclear-weapon States to take concrete steps in order to move forward with the urgent reduction and total elimination of their arsenals.

We welcome the 21 March entry into force of the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia. This legal instrument is a significant step forward in strengthening the denuclearization regime and achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Rio Group reaffirms the importance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its three pillars: nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. We are committed to its universality. Therefore we urge States that have not yet done so to adhere to the Treaty as non-nuclear-weapon States.

We also reaffirm the need to comply with the entirety of the NPT, the cornerstone of the disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation regime, without interpreting it or implementing it on a selective basis. We must respect the inalienable right of all States to research, production and the peaceful use of nuclear energy without discrimination, and to the exchange of materials, equipment and scientific and technological information for such purposes, within the framework of international law and in step with obligations undertaken with the International Atomic Energy Agency. At the same time, we urge the nuclear-weapon States to fulfil their nuclear disarmament obligations under article VI of the Treaty. The Group believes that it is essential that there be compliance with the 13 practical steps agreed upon at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

The Group calls on the Conference on Disarmament to establish as soon as possible an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, with the aim of beginning negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons within a specific time period, including a convention on nuclear weapons.

Our Group reiterates its call to the nuclear-weapon States to adopt all necessary measures for the conclusion, on a priority basis, of a universal, unconditional and legally binding treaty on negative security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States. Until such a treaty exists, the nuclear-weapon States must fully respect existing commitments regarding security assurances. We also stress the relevance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the illegality of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In this regard, we reaffirm the importance of the unanimous conclusion of the Court that there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.

The Rio Group cannot fail to express its concern over the possibility of an arms race in outer space. It is for this reason that we urge the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiating a legally binding international agreement to prevent it. We also ask that forum to start negotiations on a non-discriminatory and multilateral treaty on the prohibition of fissile materials which includes an international verification regime.

We reiterate our position on the complete cessation of nuclear testing. We stress the importance of attaining universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). We also underscore the importance of maintaining a moratorium on all testing of nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices until the Treaty’s entry into force. In that context, we hope that the recent announcements by certain nuclear Powers on the Treaty’s ratification will be followed by concrete steps.
With regard to the agenda item “Elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade”, the Group believes that a fourth decade would have a significant positive role in mobilizing global efforts to respond to the current and emerging challenges in the areas of disarmament, arms control, proliferation and international security. A fourth disarmament decade would help return disarmament to the top of the international action agenda and assist in establishing indicative targets aimed at swifter attainment of the objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

As for the third agenda item, “Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons”, the Group will confine itself to making brief preliminary comments at this time. As that important issue will be addressed at the next session of the Commission, we will then have an opportunity to address it in a much broader and more detailed manner, including topics of particular interest to the region.

Our region is among those that have made the most progress in implementing confidence-building measures in the area of conventional weapons. Such measures contribute to the enhancement of international peace and security because they are specifically designed to promote understanding, transparency and cooperation among States. That is why we believe it to be essential to strengthen, improve and broaden confidence-building measures at all levels.

In that regard, we recall General Assembly resolutions 59/92, 60/82, 61/79 and 63/57, which our region supports and which were adopted by consensus. One of their objectives is to enhance the exchange of information on confidence-building measures in the area of conventional weapons. The information, voluntarily provided by States, is stored in an electronic database created for that purpose by the Office for Disarmament Affairs. It facilitates periodic consultations on progress made in the design and implementation of confidence-building measures, functioning as an additional transparency mechanism within the United Nations.

Finally, the Rio Group is fully prepared to cooperate with you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Bureau to ensure concrete results at this session. We call on all delegations to demonstrate the political will and flexible positions necessary if we are to achieve a good outcome.

Mr. Sawicz (Poland): Sir, your election to the chairmanship of the 2009 session of the Disarmament Commission once again reaffirms the strong dedication of the Republic of Poland to disarmament and non-proliferation matters.

The only reason I am taking the floor today is to strengthen our firm engagement by presenting to the Commission the report from the conference of the Warsaw Reflection Group on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The conference, entitled “Arms control revisited: non-proliferation and denuclearization”, was held in Warsaw on 20 and 21 November 2008. It was jointly organized by the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Forty diplomats, scholars and politicians from 15 countries, as well as from the United Nations, attended the meeting. The United Nations disarmament machinery was represented at the highest possible level by Ambassador Sergio Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. The intellectual leadership and chairmanship of the Warsaw meeting was provided by Professor Adam Daniel Rotfeld, Chairman of the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.

The Warsaw conference, with its intellectual dimension and its broad range of topics, joined the mainstream of the ongoing discussion being carried out by non-governmental centres and such initiatives as the Oslo Conference on Achieving the Vision of a World Free of Nuclear Weapons, held in February 2008, or the just-concluded Carnegie International Non-Proliferation Conference, held in Washington, D.C.

In addition to its rich agenda, the Warsaw conference offered a unique opportunity to explore the history of nuclear disarmament. Stanislaw Shushkevich, first President of independent Belarus, and Boris Tarasyuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, and their reports contributed significantly to institutional knowledge about nuclear disarmament and offered effective solutions for the future. In particular, reports on the dramatic negotiations on the 1992 Lisbon Protocol, which ultimately contributed to the denuclearization of Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, drew the attention of participants.
In conclusion, I should like to inform colleagues that the report goes together with the English version of the article, published on 3 April by the former President and the former Prime Minister of Poland, as mentioned in the Chairman’s opening statement. The report is available at the back of the room. A limited number of additional copies will be provided by the delegation of Poland on Monday.

The Chairman: I call on the representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Hong Je Ryong (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea): I am taking the floor in response to the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Australia. It is quite regrettable that that representative has joined those countries that are hostile to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea by condemning our satellite launch on 5 April. His statement was useless, as it deliberately ignored the actual situation and what really happened on the Korean peninsula.

As for Security Council resolutions or statements concerning the Korean peninsula, I wish to reiterate our total rejection of them. Those resolutions and statements, which are devoid of fairness and accountability, cannot represent the international community. Therefore, they have no legal force. Our satellite launch was undertaken in a legitimate and transparent manner, in full conformity with all relevant international law.

Organization of work (continued)

The Chairman: Since we do not have Chairmen for either of the Working Groups, we will have to start next week with a plenary meeting to elect them. Thereafter, the plenary meeting will immediately become the first meeting of the Working Group. If we elect both Chairs, the Working Group on the elements of a declaration will meet first. If we have a Chairman for only one Working Group, then naturally that Group will have the honour to begin its substantive work this year.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.