

(Mr. Sadleir, Australia)

If the political climate is bad and if the assurances, the prospect of security are not as firm as they might be, it is not for us here in this Committee to collapse into despair. We, above all, are charged by our Governments, by our peoples and by the United Nations system to work towards disarmament. That is a key responsibility. It is precisely when the political climate is most difficult, when the assurances each of our States seeks are most lacking, that we of the Committee on Disarmament should be making the most urgent efforts to press our responsibilities and bring forward agreement when none seems possible. I venture to suggest that one substantial achievement, only one achievement, on our part at this session would do much to restore that spirit of optimism in the international community which in recent years has so sadly been lacking.

I turn now to the items on our agenda. For Australia, the first item, the nuclear test ban, has always held special importance. Of the several dozen disarmament resolutions adopted at the thirty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly, few can be said to have much importance for negotiating disarmament. One, however, resolution 36/85, is sufficiently balanced and sufficiently constructive to show the way ahead in tackling the question of a nuclear test ban. I am happy both that Australia played a leading role in drafting this resolution and that it attracted 140 positive votes and no negative votes in plenary. The resolution stresses the indispensable role of this Committee in negotiating a test ban. It also asks the Committee to determine the institutional and administrative arrangements necessary for establishing, testing and operating an international seismic monitoring network and an effective verification system.

In the context of resolution 36/85, the Committee's attention should be drawn again to document CD/95, which my delegation introduced in 1980 and which provides an illustrative list of subjects which might, in this context, be examined by the Committee. Many delegations have, in the past, urged us to be more ambitious and to hold out for immediate, full-scale negotiations on a comprehensive test ban. Many delegations have, in the past, considered that only in the forum of a working group could substantive discussion on a CTB take place. It is the view of my delegation that rigidity will not help us in present circumstances, either as to the context or to the way we go about our work. We consider that detailed and practical consideration of the elements of a nuclear test ban can and should take place, at an early date, in one of a range of possible formal or informal sub-groups of this Committee. The Ad Hoc Group of Scientific Experts has long been a model of patient industry, on just one aspect bearing on an eventual nuclear test ban. There is no reason why other aspects cannot now be addressed with similar efficacy.

The subject of chemical weapons is the other agenda item of particular importance to my delegation. Here again there is a strong and valuable United Nations resolution to guide us. Here, I draw attention to resolution 36/96 A. Here again is a chance for the Committee to be imaginative in the method of its work and to avoid needlessly standing square-on and stationary before a roadblock. There is no doubt that the mandate of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Chemical Weapons has run its course and needs revising. So long as a new mandate permits progress its precise terms should not greatly matter: the "elaboration of a chemical weapons convention" seems to us to be our task and there is no earthly use in wasting time on semantics before getting down to it.

There is absolutely no question that the need to ban chemical weapons is urgent. Because such weapons are militarily effective -- providing as they do a flexible and stunning option, particularly for surprise attack -- they are widely