

(Mr. Garcia Robles, Mexico)

Once the characteristics of the arsenals are known, the basic obligation that the draft convention imposes on their owners is to destroy them. A period of 10 years is proposed for the total destruction of the chemical weapons currently in existence. My delegation has carefully considered the reasons that have been set forth to justify the length of that period, such as the capacity of destruction facilities and the precautions that will have to be taken to preserve the environment, but, despite that, it believes that the efforts to shorten that period as far as possible should continue. It seems to us excessive to have to wait at least 10 long years after the convention comes into force for the risk of a chemical war to disappear.

There is no agreement as yet on the order of destruction, a matter which is under negotiation by the main possessors of chemical weapons. As a position of principle, my delegation would like to place on record that it would prefer it if destruction began with the most dangerous weapons, so as to do away speedily with the greatest danger, and the least lethal were left till last. Unfortunately, this view is not shared by the possessors of chemical weapons, who want to keep intact until the very last minute their capacity to use the most toxic of such arms. We hope that they will reconsider this attitude, which seems to us a selfish one, and that they will give thought to the fact that confidence in the future convention depends largely on the rapid disappearance of the most significant arsenals.

We regret that it has not yet been possible to reach an agreement on production facilities. We know that the delegations concerned are continuing to hold intensive consultations on this delicate matter, and we hope that very soon they will be able to submit to us the solution they have agreed upon.

I shall now turn to two questions which, in view of their importance, will be crucial to the success of our work: I refer to what is termed "non-production" and to all that relates to verification.

As I said a moment ago, one of the paramount objectives of the convention we are now negotiating is to prevent the manufacture of chemical weapons in future. To achieve this objective, it will be inevitable to impose certain controls on civilian industry, including some restrictions on industries producing substances that might be diverted to prohibited purposes. This is something which will undoubtedly affect all States parties, whether they are possessors or not possessors of chemical weapons, developed countries or developing countries, and it has therefore been playing a preponderant role in our discussions for some time.

The substances of interest have been divided into three basic categories in keeping with the risk they entail. On the basis of this classification, a number of verification systems involving measures of varying stringency have been devised. Thus, the production of substances in schedule 1 -- mostly neurotoxic agents -- in amounts exceeding one tonne per year will be prohibited; the manufacture of compounds in schedule 2 -- key precursors -- will be subject to a strict régime of international inspections to avoid their diversion for prohibited purposes; and, finally, the production and use of the substances in schedule 3 -- those that could be used for the manufacture of chemical weapons but are employed on a large scale for legitimate peaceful activities -- will have to be declared as precisely as possible to the international authority.