

(Mr. Shannon, Canada)

Lastly, the various "friends of the Chair" on such issues as article X, "old chemical weapons", and "jurisdiction and control" have made very laudable efforts to develop consensus approaches to these long-standing issues.

Notwithstanding these advances, however, we are disappointed and disturbed that more was not achieved during this past summer, particularly given the sense of heightened expectations that seemed to prevail during the spring session - expectations that my delegation certainly shared, as I indicated in my statement of 24 April.

This failure to achieve greater progress is surprising also in view of the signing, on 1 June, of the United States/USSR bilateral agreement for the cessation of CW production and the destruction of all but 5,000 agent tonnes of their CW stockpiles by 31 December 2002. My Government welcomed that agreement and hoped that it would further facilitate the early conclusion of our multilateral negotiations here in Geneva.

In saying this, I should note that my delegation is not one of those that believe that all it will take to wind up our negotiations and produce a draft convention for signature is sheer political will. Certainly that will be necessary, but there yet remain a number of major, crucial issues to be resolved. There are also important technical questions that still need to be thoroughly addressed if we are to produce a truly effective convention.

The reasons for this limited progress seem as varied as they are elusive. Some have indeed pointed to an alleged lack of willpower. Or perhaps there is an unreadiness in some quarters to accept that we might actually be on the verge of a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons. Others might point to an insidious, dangerous, degradation of the overall negotiating climate, where chemical weapons proliferation is increasing and where chemical weapons are seen by some - erroneously, we believe - as a "poor man's" weapon of mass destruction.

Quite irrespective of the current situation in the Middle East, that area has been a source of particular concern for some time because of the approach of some States in the region to chemical weapons. Chemical weapons were used there not long ago and, recently, threats to use CW have been made which then provoked counter-threats. We call upon all countries to refrain from such potentially inflammatory statements. These can only contribute to heightened tension and greater uncertainty. Canada firmly believes that chemical weapons should have no place in the armouries of modern nations, and that the only road to real security against the chemical weapons threat lies in the negotiation of a global ban on chemical weapons, on which we in the Conference on Disarmament are now actively engaged.

The Canadian Government's position is very clear: we firmly support the goal of a total ban on chemical weapons. And we want to see this achieved as soon as is feasible - not tomorrow or next week, but also not 5 or 10 years from now. Delay can only add to the risk of greater proliferation and greater use of chemical weapons.