

(Mr. Friedersdorf, United States of America)

On 18 July 1985, shortly after the United States Congress funded the United States' chemical weapons modernization programme, the Soviet Union issued a press release designed to "kill" production of binary chemical weapons (CD/615). Using distortions, the statement accused the United States of stalling on chemical weapons negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. The United States at that time was forced to use this Conference's valuable time to set the record straight. Subsequently, of course, the unprecedented progress enjoyed in our negotiations, and the role the United States has played in achieving that progress, has further discredited the 1985 Soviet assertions.

During the ensuing months, it became necessary on more than one occasion to take the floor to call upon the Soviet Union and others to moderate their rhetoric and stop misrepresenting the facts and the intentions of other delegations. We have repeatedly pointed out that this counter-productive approach not only wastes valuable negotiating time, but also sours the negotiating atmosphere. We have made clear that we will set the record straight whenever United States policies are misrepresented, but that the Conference on Disarmament would be better served if such misrepresentations were never made.

We thought that perhaps we had put our point across, because everyone seemed to take a relatively constructive approach to negotiations during 1987, enabling us to make unprecedented progress toward a chemical weapons convention.

We were disappointed, therefore, to see that the Soviet Union has once again launched a propaganda campaign against United States CW modernization. Typical of this effort is yet another Soviet Foreign Ministry statement, released by TASS on 26 December 1987, which has been circulated as CD/790.

Predictably, once again we are here to set the record straight, point out what a time-consuming, counter-productive exercise these exchanges are, and suggest that all delegations concentrate on the task at hand. Let us examine some of these Soviet allegations.

In the latest Soviet statement, the United States' CW modernization programme is described as a step toward a new twist in the chemical arms race. Chemical arms race? With whom has the Soviet Union been racing? Not with the United States, which did not produce a single chemical weapon for 18 years. Nor is there any other chemical weapon threat which would warrant accumulation of the large chemical weapons stockpile the Soviet Union has acquired.

The TASS article states that the United States modernization initiative was unprovoked. As we have pointed out many times, modernization was necessary because the adequacy of the United States' chemical deterrent capability had become a matter of grave concern. During the long period after the United States ceased production of chemical weapons, existing stocks deteriorated. Less than a third of the United States' chemical weapons stockpile is now usable, and most of that small portion has only limited military value.