

(Mr. van SCHAİK, Netherlands)

that a discussion on the decision-making powers and the functioning of the Consultative Committee and the Executive Council could perhaps be more productive, once we agree on the major outlines of the more substantive provisions of the agreement we are aiming at.

I think no delegation having participated in the three Working Groups or in the drafting sessions under Ambassador Ekéus' wise supervision would upon reflection maintain that the major differences have been resolved. However, progress is being made. Our assessment of the work in this summer part of the session is not negative. But progress in such a complex area as that of a chemical weapons ban is necessarily slow and painstaking, demanding a maximum effort of participating delegations.

The time-table of the Conference on Disarmament with its regular interruptions when the yearly spring and summer parts of the session end, constitutes an undesirable loss of momentum in the chemical weapons negotiations. In the past the Netherlands has proposed that the Conference on Disarmament should remain formally in session the year round. Thus its subsidiary bodies would, apart from other advantages, be allowed maximum flexibility to define their own schedule of meetings. In the two years behind us a hesitant attempt in this direction has been made when the session of the chemical weapons subsidiary body was extended for a period of two or three weeks in January. This experiment has not been very productive, however.

My delegation is interested to hear the views of Chairman Ekéus on how this year we can prevent an abrupt interruption of the work for four or five months. We understand that many amongst us wish the negotiations to be continued this autumn. We on our part would be prepared to participate in any meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons to be convened in Geneva between 15 October and the beginning of December, 1984. In informal consultations on this option we have so far heard two main reservations. One concerned manpower problems, in view of the coinciding session of the First Committee of the General Assembly. We submit that the importance of early progress on chemical weapons negotiations in itself outweighs the obstacles of a practical nature, which can be overcome if the political will is there to resolve those difficulties. How can we convince the public at large that we mean business, if at the same time we fail to produce the experts to conduct that business? Another observation we heard is that no effort should be made to meet in the autumn unless there are good prospects for results. This argument does not appear to be convincing to my delegation. If we were to lend any credit to such reasoning, we would set another precondition to the conducting of negotiations in the framework of the Conference on Disarmament and in so doing, put the cart before the horse.

Geneva would be our preferred location for the meeting in the autumn, where delegates could concentrate on substantive work, whereas in New York their attention may be diverted to matters pertaining to the First Committee.

As I stated earlier, the very serious issues at stake in the negotiations on a chemical-weapons ban warrant a continued effort to bring them to a successful solution. At a time when, alas, the use of chemical weapons is, in flagrant violation of the Geneva Protocol, a bitter reality, we, as negotiators, should not be held responsible for any undue delay.