

(Mr. Morel, France)

in Prague on 10 April by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev stated that "as far as stocks of chemical weapons are concerned, the Soviet Union has started building a special plant to destroy them". My delegation welcomes this step in the direction desired by all because it deals with a practical aspect of the destruction of existing stocks, an essential element of any agreement providing for a complete ban. We think it would be all the more useful to hear from the Soviet delegation certain clarifications on the following points:

The first question deals with the relationship between the provisions of the draft convention concerning the starting of the process of eliminating chemical weapons on the one hand, and the commissioning of the destruction plant envisaged in the Soviet proposal on the other. More specifically, the draft convention provides that each State party should begin destroying its stocks of chemical weapons a certain number of months (yet to be decided) after the entry into force of the Convention. This time span is therefore relatively short. On the other hand, the Soviet statement indicates that a possibly fairly lengthy period will be necessary for the construction of a disposal plant. Therefore there is a risk that this plant might not be ready to operate when required. There is a possible time lag here, and we would like to have further information about this point.

The same query is also valid for the annual destruction capacity of the facility concerned. The draft convention, as we know, specifies a destruction period spread over 10 years. In this connection the Soviet representative stated here on 5 March that each year each State party should eliminate each year a ninth of its stocks in each of the existing categories. Therefore we think that the additional information concerning the ways and means of operating this destruction facility should lead the Soviet delegation to provide details of the volume that the USSR would have to destroy, and also the annual destruction capacity it thinks it will have to have.

The fact is that we have only very recently received indirect and very incomplete information with regard to the very existence of Soviet chemical weapons stocks. Hence the recent Soviet announcements concerning destruction give us an opportunity to get down to specifics in this fundamental aspect of the convention. It seems to us desirable that all countries participating in the negotiations should be in a position to assess the future relationship between the disposal plant and the stocks themselves. The bilateral Soviet-United States exchange visits proposed recently cannot serve as an adequate source of information for the entire international community.

The question of challenge inspection has recently been the subject of very useful exchanges of views, and we have noted with a great deal of interest the comments that have been submitted to the Conference on this subject. On the basis of the position my country has already set out on several occasions when giving its full backing to document CD/715 submitted by the United Kingdom, we would like to present today one or two comments of a practical nature with regard to the conduct of such inspections.