

(Mr. Ledogar, United States)

Congressman Martin Lancaster and members of his staff. Mr. Lancaster is visiting the United States delegation in his capacity as one of four members of the United States House of Representatives who have been appointed by the Speaker of the House, Mr. Foley as special arms control observers for the chemical weapons negotiations. Congressman Lancaster is making his second trip to Geneva in this capacity, and we welcome his presence among us today as clear evidence that United States interest in a CW convention extends well beyond the executive branch. The United States Congress follows our work here with keen interest. We look forward to working closely with Mr. Lancaster and his colleagues on Capitol Hill.

Secondly, I would like to draw the attention of the members of the Conference to the joint statement on chemical weapons which was issued in Moscow on 10 February, three days ago, by Secretary of State Baker and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. Together with my Soviet colleague, Minister Batsanov, I participated in the Ministerial Meeting and in the preparation of this important bilateral statement. In the United States view, this statement reaffirms President Bush's strong commitment to progress in the multilateral negotiations for a CW convention and our expectation that those bilateral efforts will enhance our multilateral work. You will see that the statement, first of all, reiterates our joint commitment to conclude and bring into force a CW convention as soon as possible. Secondly, it announces our intention, simultaneous with the negotiations on a global ban, to pursue reciprocal obligations: inter alia a programme of co-operation with respect to the destruction of chemical weapons, including co-ordinating the destruction of substantial quantities of CW stocks down to equal low levels on each side. Third, as part of this agreement, we will co-operate on safe destruction technology and carry out further verification experiments. Fourth, we commit ourselves further to reduce our CW stocks down to a very small fraction of present holdings during the first eight years after a CW convention enters into force, and to complete elimination during the subsequent two years, if possible. Fifth, we agree to halt all CW production when a CW convention enters into force. And, finally, the two sides will work to develop common principles that underlie our efforts to prevent the proliferation of chemical weapons.

President Bush believes that as the countries with the largest CW stocks, the United States and the Soviet Union should take the lead in destruction. This will give impetus to the negotiations, in our view, by demonstrating how serious the United States and the Soviet Union are about getting rid of these weapons. Our proposal to destroy all but a very small portion of CW stocks in the first eight years of a convention, we believe, puts this convention on a faster track than the ideas some of our countries talked about before, which would have delayed entry into force until all essential States adhere. What we are saying now is - let us get the convention into force right away with the United States and the Soviet Union on board so that the benefits can be realized right away, and we can work hard to get the other necessary States on board. If we succeed over the first 8 years we can all go to zero in 10 years; if not, it is the United States interpretation that we will have to keep at it. At least we will have the convention with its reductions, production ban, export controls, secretariat, etc.