

(Mr. Rasaputram, Sri Lanka)

In our statement at the last session of the CD we expressed optimism that a comprehensive and global ban on chemical weapons was within reach. Recent developments have enhanced this optimism. We indeed believe that the CW negotiations have now entered a decisive, and hopefully, the terminal phase. We also stated then that the bulk of the "technical infrastructure" of the convention was in place and that remaining issues should be addressed in a political perspective with a view to taking decisions through compromises. We now feel that the negotiations are poised to move in that direction.

We welcome in this context the initiative by the President of the United States in announcing a most constructive change of position facilitating a consensus on the main prohibition of the convention covering the entire chemical weapons cycle including the unconditional destruction of CW stocks within the specified time-frame. We take satisfaction at the fact that this development has already led to the emergence of a consensus on article I of the Convention. The comprehensive character of the main prohibition that we now have, which is applicable in any circumstances whatsoever, will augur well for achieving the desired objective of universality. We hope that somewhat related issue of article XII will be resolved expeditiously. As my delegation sees it, the remaining issue relating to article XII involves both legal and political questions. Given the comprehensive and multilateral nature of the convention that we all hope for, it is important that we adopt innovative solutions to such problems. In this regard, the interesting idea put forward by the distinguished Ambassador of Austria is worthy of serious consideration by countries which have entered reservations to the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The possibility of a collective withdrawal of reservations would be an expression of greater political support for the kind of comprehensive regime envisaged under the convention. It would also amount to an important confidence-building measure, commensurate with the unconditional prohibition which we have already secured collectively.

A consensus having been reached in the Conference for an intensified work programme, for which we would like to thank Ambassador Batsanov, it is now important for the Committee to maintain the momentum of its work. We therefore hope that new substantive proposals aiming at developing a consensus acceptable to all delegations will be forthcoming on remaining major issues such as inspection on request. My delegation shares the view that the procedure for inspections on request is an important part of the verification regime to maintain the confidence of all countries, large and small, developed and developing. We also believe that in order to achieve this desired objective, the concept itself should retain its multilateral character and be depoliticized. Its intrusiveness and use should be managed in a way consistent with the objectives and the scope of the Convention. The new inputs expected, we hope, will address these aspects and lead to consensus.

In our statement to the CD on 22 March last year, my delegation referred to two aspects of a possible framework to facilitate solutions to remaining political questions. One was the desirability of a time-frame to conclude our negotiations and the other was the question whether we should look at a package format to handle remaining issues in the terminal phase of our negotiations. My delegation stated then: