

(Mr. Dhanapala, Sri Lanka)

Mr. DHANAPALA (Sri Lanka): Mr. President, certain remarks were made in the plenary on Tuesday, 14 April in what was apparently a response to the statement made by my delegation on Thursday, 9 April. The Sri Lanka delegation, unaccustomed as it is either to provoking or engaging in rights of reply in this august assembly, considers it necessary to state the following for the record.

Firstly, as regards the de facto functioning of groups in the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Sri Lanka can speak authoritatively, as a former Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, to the effect that non-aligned Foreign Ministers meet annually at the beginning of every session in the United Nations and issue a communiqué providing guidance on the items of the agenda. In addition the non-aligned delegations of the First Committee meet regularly to discuss and co-ordinate their positions on the issues before the Committee.

Secondly, the process of multilateral diplomatic negotiation over resolutions in the General Assembly is not private and, especially when formal proposals are made specifically on behalf of a delegation or a group of delegations, we see no impropriety in these being mentioned relevantly in a plenary session of this Conference. There is, after all, a close interrelationship between the work of the First Committee of the General Assembly and our work here.

Thirdly, no aspersion was intended, let alone uttered, by my delegation in respect of the delegation of Italy, which was one among the many delegations participating in the consultations over the General Assembly resolution on this subject in 1985 and 1986. Indeed my statement specifically referred to the delegation of Italy as having worked "long and with so much dedication" on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. We reiterate our appreciation of the work of Italy on this issue.

In conclusion, may I state that the difficulties mentioned by my delegation in its statement of Thursday, 9 April which prevented the earlier start of the substantive work of the Ad Hoc Committee on item 5 of our agenda are now behind us. My delegation does not therefore wish to be drawn into a protracted debate over the causes for this delay by a more extensive refutation of the remarks that were made on 14 April directed at my delegation.

May I, Mr. President like preceding speakers, express the pleasure of my delegation at the presence of the distinguished Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia in the Conference this morning, and thank him, through you, for his important statement.