

(Mr. McPhail, Canada)

Last spring, I noted that, in our opinion, it would be wise for the Committee to make an objective assessment of the direction in which we were moving and why precisely because we were leading towards the next special session devoted to disarmament. While it is true that the Committee on Disarmament is the sole multilateral negotiating body and therefore possesses unique authority, its authority, we repeat once more, ultimately depends upon the results it produces. This year we face a shortened session, yet this year, even more is expected of the Committee: and, let us face it, more hope is invested in it than in the past. These, then, are the international and internal atmospherics affecting the tasks with which the Committee is charged in the period up to the second special session. I now would like to turn briefly to these tasks:

Those who participated in the efforts of the Working Group on Chemical Weapons have reason to be satisfied. A number of the most complex areas in the elaboration of an eventual chemical weapons treaty were identified and set down. Complex problems remain, some substantive and some technical, particularly in the field of verifying the terms of an eventual treaty; and some, of course, of a more political nature.

It is a matter of great regret to us that the traditional resolution on chemical weapons jointly co-sponsored by Canada, Poland, the Byelorussian SSR and Japan was not adopted by consensus at the last General Assembly. The lack of consensus on this resolution could mean that the way is open for a prolonged debate on procedural matters, should some in this Committee so choose. Such a debate in our view would, we fear, sacrifice substance to form. We are confident, however, that such a debate can be avoided and indeed we hope and expect that the mandate of the Working Group on Chemical Weapons will be adopted in this Committee by consensus.

Many expect that the comprehensive programme of disarmament will be a "centrepiece" of the second special session on disarmament. There are few areas where the consensus-building procedure of finding the lowest common denominator of agreement and raising it to the highest is more important than during our efforts to develop a comprehensive programme that can be accepted by all. This process will require patience and flexibility, for only through compromise is consensus possible. Great problems remain and consensus is by no means certain. We are encouraged however, that it does appear there is a gathering consensus on the holding of review conferences. This is only a beginning, but a good beginning.

We continue to believe that a treaty on radiological weapons has the advantage of closing off a weapons option and the prospects for its development. We do not exaggerate the importance of such a treaty, but we do think it would be a positive step. This said, if at all possible -- and we think it is possible -- the conclusion of the text of such a treaty by the time of the second special session would represent the first concrete evidence of the Committee on Disarmament's ability to produce an agreement. It is for this symbolic reason that we consider the conclusion of a text more important than it would otherwise be. There are still a number of proposals which could be incorporated into the text of a treaty on radiological weapons, particularly one put forward by Sweden on the safeguarding from attack of civilian nuclear facilities. It is surely not beyond the skill of this negotiating forum to find a technique for addressing seriously this question in parallel with the work already undertaken on the treaty.