

(Mr. O'Sullivan, Australia)

has said, "is likely to lack the clarity and stability of the cold war, and to be a more jungle-like world of multiple dangers, hidden traps, unpleasant surprises and moral ambiguities". This will be particularly so if pressures from regional arms races result in the further proliferation of conventional, nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the spread of missile technology. With the experience of recent weeks, the international community will expect these questions to be addressed with renewed vigour.

Under these circumstances, the relevance and salience of the work of this Conference has increased. The threat of the use of chemical weapons in the Gulf war makes the achievement of a complete ban of chemical weapons for all times and in all environments even more urgently required. I will therefore address chemical weapons issues principally in this statement today.

The Australian Government is fully committed to a ban which would make chemical weapons illegal and which would prohibit their use. We believe our security and that of our neighbours would be enhanced by a binding multilateral commitment which assured us all that we would not face the threat of these horrible weapons. We believe that the international political conditions exist to bring such a ban into effect by concluding these negotiations. We hope in this final stage of the convention negotiations that we will recapture in 1991 the spirit that was evident two years ago at the Paris Conference and 18 months ago at the Canberra Conference, when Governments and the chemical industry committed themselves to that same objective.

We recognize however that there is a limit what officials here in Geneva may be able to achieve through the processes of negotiation and that higher-level involvement may be necessary to provide the political direction to break through the remaining problems. We therefore support calls for a meeting at ministerial level.

As we see it, the purpose of such a meeting would be to overcome political impasses in the negotiations and to give final instructions to permit the conclusion of a balanced treaty package. This requires careful preparation of the elements of such a package. It could be that we will need to prepare options so that ministers would be able to assess which proposals are both feasible in their impact on industry and credible in their contribution to collective security. A second reason for suggesting and supporting a ministerial-level meeting would be to help promote universal adherence to it. As a newcomer to this Conference I observe that there is a considerable part of the world which is not represented here. Even amongst Governments which are here represented there are different constituencies in different countries which will need to be educated about the treaty. This means there is a significant "selling job" ahead of us to have a treaty supported as widely as possible amongst Governments and as broadly as possible within Governments.

Of course participation in the deliberations of this Conference is not limited to its 39 member States. We were pleased to see the Conference approve, on 31 January, the application for observer status of 34 nations. We would have been even happier if that number had been larger, particularly as we approach the final phase, of the negotiations of a multilateral chemical weapons convention.