

(Mr. Reese, Australia)

universality. There needs to be more flexibility on the part of delegations in this area. Where a proposal is not favoured by some delegations, there should be a greater attempt at an exchange of views to determine the best way of finding common ground.

The chemical weapons convention will offer a package of measures that will be unprecedented in the security and commercial areas. The willingness of States to accept this uniquely complex, politically sensitive and commercially intrusive treaty depends on a subtle balancing of many interests. Because of these complexities, it has taken so many years to get to the point where the convention is within sight. This situation requires all parties to the negotiations to intensify efforts to get the convention concluded.

I think we were all aware that the issues of verification and the character of the Executive Council were going to be the most difficult issues to resolve in developing the convention. We are not at that point, and that may be the reason for the current sense of faltering. But it is also a time when the international community's need for the elimination of chemical weapons could not be more apparent. Recent developments in the Persian Gulf bring home to all of us the concern that while chemical weapons exist there is the danger that they might be used. We believe that the coming decade will see either a worsening of chemical weapons proliferation, in which chemical weapons will become a common feature of many national arsenals, or the effective functioning of an international authority dedicated to the oversight of a total ban on these weapons. It is the moment for us to assess carefully the point we have reached in the negotiations and to determine the best way forward.

In Australia's view, the negotiations are now in need of clear political direction in the absence of which the negotiations may well flounder. A number of other delegations have recently expressed a similar view. Now that the structure and content of the convention is apparent, or, as another delegation has put it, now that all the main issues are on the table, it is essential for Governments to focus on bridging the remaining differences, and particularly in the critical area of verification.

While we do not think artificial deadlines are appropriate, the fact is that setting deadlines is often the only way to bring sufficient concentration and attention to detail to get matters resolved. The alternative is too easily a leisurely pace which leads to opportunities lost as one or several of the many ingredients change. In this regard, we were pleased with the more substantial and comprehensive industry input at the meetings held in June. We welcome the significant achievements in the bilateral agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union. Those agreements need now to be translated into the multilateral environments, since the problems posed by chemical weapons cannot be resolved by bilateral measures alone. We agree with the ideas proposed by some delegations for ministerial meetings in the first half of 1991, to be followed, we believe, by the presentation of the completed convention to the United Nations General Assembly at its forty-sixth session.