

Mr. ERRERA (France) (translated from French):

... We listened with great attention to the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia. It is unnecessary to stress its importance and scope. This statement reminds us how high the stakes are. It comes at a decisive moment in our negotiations on the chemical weapons convention. It calls upon us to shoulder our responsibilities. Today we are at a point where our negotiations can be concluded by the end of the year. We are convinced of it. We are determined that it should be so - this has indeed been stated by the majority of the countries in the Conference and set out in the mandate we have assigned ourselves for the year 1992. And, lastly, this is a realistic goal: because considerable work has already been accomplished and few issues remain pending. Even if some of them are fundamental, they have as we know been clearly identified.

In stressing the paramount importance it attaches to the need to conclude the first multilateral disarmament agreement in 1992, France reaffirms that it is ready to make substantial efforts to ensure that this process succeeds. It goes without saying that the goal of rapid conclusion should not be reached at the expense of some essential elements of the convention: this applies, in particular, to the verification regime, which we want to act as a deterrent, so as to make the convention credible vis-à-vis potential violators. In this context, we view the Australian initiative as a major contribution to the early achievement of consensus in our negotiations.

It is no secret that, like other delegations, we initially harboured some doubts about the appropriateness of this initiative. We feel all the more at liberty today to express our full support for it, not only because it is generally acceptable to us - even if it can, of course, be further improved - but also and primarily because it is, in our view, the instrument which will allow us to conclude the convention this year, and this for two reasons. First, this document is consistent with the spirit and often the letter of our work as it appears in the "rolling text". This draft convention is a text in treaty form that has been the subject of considerable work involving rewriting, restructuring and simplifying, as compared to the present "rolling text": no more footnotes, nor bracketed alternative formulations. This work needed to be done. We are particularly grateful to the Australian authorities for having accomplished this difficult task so well. As the

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