

(Mr. Tindemans, Belgium)

The international organization to be set up will be the spearhead of verification of chemical disarmament. It should be able to begin its activities as soon as possible after the entry into force. We welcome the fact that, as can be seen from the excellent working paper that the United Kingdom introduced here on 14 July last, there has been concrete thinking on the subject. In this regard I am pleased to be able to announce that my country would give favourable consideration to hosting the international organization if the Conference so requested.

The negotiations taking place in the Conference on Disarmament aim at ensuring lasting compliance with the ban on the use of chemical weapons established by the Geneva Protocol of 1925. But it must be stressed that the success of such an endeavour will depend on the support that it gets from the international community in the form of accession and ratification by the greatest possible number of countries. That implies broad participation in the negotiating process. Each and everyone should be able to present his proposals and describe his position with respect to the various aspects of the draft convention.

Universal acceptance of the future convention will be encouraged if we manage to take into account certain concerns. Of these, the need for undiminished security is probably the most important and it should be resolved in the context of the order of destruction of existing stocks of chemical weapons. In this regard, it is clear that account will have to be taken of the very marked differences, both quantitative and qualitative, between the stocks that countries hold.

The universal character of the future convention could be jeopardized if the convention is not legally consistent. It will be important for the future convention to be structured logically around the fundamental principles expressed in its first article so that the wording used lends itself as little as possible to dubious or ambiguous interpretations.

Finally, it is essential that there should be no confusion as to the actual definition of chemical weapons. My country advocates a legal definition of the weapon itself and hopes that it will be possible to go beyond a mere enumeration of the material elements of which such weapons may consist. Suggestions have been informally advanced by the delegation of Belgium to other delegations with a view to discussion of this matter.

Belgium has no chemical military capability and has no intention of acquiring such a capability. The obsolete chemical munitions that are to be found in a part of Belgian territory and which date from the First World War pose specific problems. My country insists that the future convention must not uselessly complicate the problems that these old chemical munitions already pose for the countries that have inherited them.