

(Mr. Houlliez, Belgium)

Belgium was among the first to sign the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which was a decisive stage in the codification of the prohibition of the use in time of war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases and of bacteriological weapons. In the recent past, unfortunately, chemical weapons have been used in violation of the Geneva Protocol. Although this treaty still constitutes today the keystone of international law concerning the prohibition of the use of chemical and biological weapons, it is not a disarmament treaty. Furthermore, the 1972 Convention on the prohibition of bacteriological weapons, notwithstanding its obvious positive aspects, is certainly not the example to be followed for chemical weapons, because it does not provide for any effective verification measures. The international community clearly understood this when it commissioned the Conference on Disarmament to prepare a convention containing a comprehensive régime for the prohibition and destruction of chemical weapons under effective international control capable of guaranteeing absolute respect for the prohibition of the use of these weapons. The technical difficulties, but also the political reluctance that has to be overcome, are still great and complex: we are fully aware of that. Happily, in recent months a common will to move beyond the obstacles and to work to build a world free of chemical weapons has become apparent. At its last session the General Assembly adopted unanimously three resolutions dealing with chemical and biological weapons. The international community thus demonstrated its great concern with respect to recent cases of the use of chemical weapons and the terrifying prospect of the development of production capacities for these weapons. The General Assembly and the Paris Conference stressed the need to force the pace of the work in Geneva and the urgent need to establish an international régime for the elimination of chemical weapons once and for all.

Several countries have taken steps in the right direction, and we welcome this favourable trend. First of all, President Mitterrand himself announced a move in the French position on undiminished security during the transition period. Very recently Mr. Roland Dumas recalled that here. Secondly, we also welcome the fact that the USSR is demonstrating a more constructive and flexible approach in several aspects of the Geneva negotiations. Mr. Shevardnadze has announced the construction of a destruction facility at Chapayevsk and a commitment to begin the destruction of Soviet stocks as soon as the facility is operational, without waiting for the convention to enter into force. We see in this intention a very important manifestation of good faith on the part of the Soviet leaders. Like Mr. Andreotti in his recent statement at the Conference on Disarmament, Belgium regrets, however, that the Soviet Union did not take that decision before the United States adopted a new programme for the production of chemical weapons after a break of almost 20 years.

Thirdly, the new President of the United States has on several occasions indicated his intention to make the convention on the elimination of all chemical weapons one of the top priorities of his foreign policy. He said last October at Toledo: