

(Mr. Bottai, Italy)

... For the first time in the history of the negotiations for the prohibition of chemical weapons, our goal finally seems to be within reach. The negotiations have proved to be much lengthier than at first expected, as a result of the difficulties in reconciling the innovative solutions gradually emerging with the diverging views between East and West as to the degree of transparency necessary to foster mutual confidence. As the history of these negotiations largely reflected, for better or for worse, the wider political circumstances of the time, they should reflect today the recent and extraordinary changes in world events. A new dimension of the role of the international community is taking shape, as particularly highlighted during the dramatic sequence of events after Kuwait's invasion by Iraq. (War always brings about a tremendous toll of suffering, and it was wise of you, Mr. President, to recall that in your opening statement on your appointment to the presidency of the CD.)

Only a limited number of weeks are left before the deadline we have set ourselves elapses; the General Assembly of the United Nations itself, at its last session, decided as a matter of the highest priority that the chemical weapons convention should be concluded before the end of the year. Should it not be possible for the Conference on Disarmament to meet this goal in time for its presentation at the next United Nations General Assembly, we are concerned that the whole project would risk postponement to a further round of negotiations of unpredictable length, with a negative impact on multilateral disarmament as a whole. We strongly believe, however, that it is possible to reach a conclusion in the negotiations and that this outcome will give new impetus to the future activity of the CD. I won't hide from you that most of the differences still existing do not seem of an unsurmountable nature to a layman not so directly involved like myself.

With great expectation we are following the extraordinary efforts you are deploying this year, at the level of delegations as well as in the context of the groupings, and we wholeheartedly support the endeavours of the German Chairman to reach compromises on the essential issues still unresolved as quickly as possible. At the same time other problems of a more technical nature could be dealt with later by the preparatory commission, with the assistance of the provisional technical secretariat.