

(Mr. Tindemans, Belgium)

complete ban on this particularly inhuman type of weapon. Despite significant progress in the negotiations that concern us here, the use and proliferation of chemical weapons remain, sadly, a reality. These weapons are still being used, particularly in the conflict between Iran and Iraq. This has been observed by investigations organized by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. An escalation is in progress in which not even the civilian populations are spared. Aware of the growing number of countries that possess chemical weapons, Belgium is participating, together with its European partners and other countries, in an international system for controlling the export of several important chemical substances so as to reverse this trend and make it more difficult to produce such weapons. This system is only a temporary measure aimed at ensuring compliance with the Geneva Protocol pending the appearance of a universal convention.

My country has actively supported the attainment of this objective since it entered the Conference on Disarmament this year. This year, Belgium is chairing Working Group B, which has responsibility in particular for preparing the provisions of the future convention on chemical disarmament, especially the destruction of existing stocks and of chemical weapons production facilities.

The international verification of the storage and destruction of chemical weapons has been accepted as regards its principles and numerous modalities have already been defined. The same applies to monitoring of the closure and elimination of production facilities.

The system for the verification of non-production is also under preparation. The known combat agents and their precursors have been taken stock of and it has already been agreed that they will be placed under international surveillance because they can all be used for peaceful purposes, if only for research. Significant progress has been made in this area that it was essential to cover. We welcome the dispelling of the apparent confusion between chemical weapons and chemical substances produced for non-prohibited purposes. We also appreciate the fact that the need to avoid unduly impeding the development of the chemical industry and of research is now beginning to be recognized by all.

Whatever progress has been or may yet be made in the areas of verification that I have just mentioned, they will none the less be incomplete until a satisfactory solution has been found to the crucial problem of challenge inspection. The very usefulness of the verification of installations coming under the convention depends, in the final analysis, on compliance with the obligation to declare them, whether they be chemical weapons stockpiling facilities or factories making dual-purpose substances. The régimes for systematic verification must, therefore, be complemented and strengthened by an effective and binding régime for challenge inspection so as to form a coherent set of measures to discourage violations by making them detectable wherever they may occur.