

(Mr. Onkelinx, Belgium)

Belgium hopes that the Committee will this year give priority in the use of its time to what is actually negotiable. The disappointing results of the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament inevitably led the Committee, during its session of last summer, to pursue this course to some extent. We trust that this trend will be confirmed and developed in 1983.

I wish to refer in particular to the question of the prohibition of chemical weapons. It is in fact these negotiations which offer the most promising prospects since the conditions for fruitful negotiation now actually exist. These negotiations can be brought to a successful conclusion in the fairly near future if all the parties concerned show the necessary flexibility. I should like today to launch an urgent appeal for this chance of success to be seized.

We are particularly encouraged by certain statements and declarations by the two countries which were conducting bilateral negotiations on this question before the Committee on Disarmament took it up. These declarations, as Mr. George Bush, the Vice-President of the United States, has just confirmed to us, indicate a willingness to move forward which can only be welcomed and which the Committee on Disarmament ought to convert into reality. We await with much interest the document promised us by Vice-President Bush and we endorse the objective he set of accelerating the work of the Committee on Disarmament with a view to eliminating the threat of chemical weapons.

We should be making a great mistake if we did not decide to put all the resources necessary at the service of these negotiations. If the Committee succeeds in putting before the General Assembly the text of a treaty prohibiting chemical weapons, we shall have achieved a great step forward in our work. If, on the other hand, we disperse our efforts, the Committee will become more and more an outmoded instrument that will fall into disuse.

Let us, then, in our use of time, give these negotiations all the priority they merit. The Working Group ought to resume its activities as soon as possible. It ought also to be able to set aside time for periods of "concentration" like those we held during the month of January. We must also take care to conduct our work in an orderly manner. The Working Group's report for 1982, usefully supplemented by the three weeks of work at the beginning of this year, provide the necessary basis for the continuation and conclusion of these negotiations.

Important work remains to be done to clarify the structure of the convention. Generally speaking, it is my delegation's belief that we should remain very flexible as regards the use of negotiating techniques. At the same time, we ought clearly to take care to avoid two dangers: the first is that of becoming embroiled in semantics, which would be a waste of time; the second is that of forgetting that there can be no agreement on the whole of the draft treaty without prior agreement on each of its elements.

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