

(Mr. van Schaik, Netherlands)

We are happy to see our colleague Ian Cromartie in the chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons this year. We know his knowledge and expertise of the subject and have great confidence in his ability -- and that of his staff -- to carry matters forward. We pay tribute to his predecessor, Ambassador Turbanski of Poland, to whom we are indebted for his dedication and perseverance in carrying matters a few steps forward. We wish him well in this period of recovery.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons begins its work at a time of new reports of the use of chemical weapons in the Gulf War. We listened with great attention to the statements made by our colleague of Iran on 18 February and subsequently by the Foreign Minister of Iran, Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, on 27 February, that also dealt with this matter. These communications reminded us of the sad fact that chemical warfare is still a tragic reality of our days. The continued violation of the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons is, of course, of direct relevance to us in the Conference. Indeed, the violation of these and other rules of international law threaten to undermine our efforts on negotiating new rules.

It is against the background of violations of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 that the Netherlands Government, jointly with others, took measures to prevent the export of certain chemical compounds liable to lead to the production of chemical weapons. We are worried by reports on a continuing spread of chemical weapons in the world, both because of the inherent threat of actual use and because it complicates our efforts to ban chemical weapons altogether. We share with others in this room, the sense of urgency to cope effectively with the danger of a further spreading of chemical weapons in the world. We also recognize that non-transfer arrangements are required in the future Convention, which will apply as long as that Convention is not universally adhered to. We do not consider the conclusion of a formal treaty -- on the analogy of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty -- a desirable objective. Efforts towards a non-proliferation régime would only detract from our main objective, hopefully not too far away, of the conclusion of a comprehensive chemical-weapons ban. Such a ban, universally adhered to, is after all the most effective answer to the problem.

All delegations in this room agree on the objective of a timely conclusion of a convention completely banning chemical weapons. That common objective of ours is, in my view, slowly but steadily taking shape. In the last few years in particular, a general understanding has been reached on the structure of the future convention. Much agreed language on various parts of the convention has been drafted in a common effort. We have a fair amount of ideas in common now on what it is that the convention will have to prohibit. As a result we have a clearer picture of what will have to be monitored, so as to ensure that the convention is fully complied with and therefore consonant with member countries' security concerns.

But as we gained a clearer insight into the issues involved, our focus sharpened also on what still needs to be resolved. First, there are the modalities for carrying out the various undertakings under the convention, which in many cases still need to be discussed and negotiated upon. Mere details as they may appear to some, they are vital to the adequate functioning of the convention. And then, there are certain basic undertakings of the convention that have hardly been touched upon. We welcome the fact that