

(Mr. Andreotti, Italy)

weapons gave the lead to the first serious thoughts on multilateral arms control, even though in 1932 the impossibility of agreeing upon appropriate verification methods prevented an attempt at banning their production. In the context of East-West relations, these weapons increase existing asymmetries, and render uncertain the nature of the response they might provoke, thus inter alia increasing the likelihood of the use of nuclear weapons.

In the case of regional conflicts, chemical weapons represent a constant temptation to escalate hostilities to levels which would justify the greatest alarm on the part of the international community. Their possession presupposes simple technology, not unlimited resources, and even a superficial training. Their components are internationally tradable, while nuclear arms are subject to extremely severe controls. The possible proliferation of chemical weapons poses a grave threat to mankind.

In recent years, regional conflicts have shown to us some of the devastating effects of chemical weapons. In Italy, we had direct evidence thereof when providing treatment to some victims of the Iran-Iraq conflict. On the basis of the conclusions reached by United Nations experts, the Italian Government has already expressed its strong condemnation of the repeated use of chemical weapons, especially against civilian populations. I personally have had the opportunity, in the past, to express my concern on the matter to the Iraqi Minister for Foreign Affairs. This is why I would like to restate once again, in this forum, the importance of safeguarding and strengthening the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and to reiterate a strong appeal to all countries to refrain from the use of these means of mass destruction, in whatever context, and above all against unarmed populations.

For many years, Italy has had no chemical weapons, nor does it station them on its territory. It further believes that conditions should be created, as soon as possible, for the generalized and genuine renunciation of such weapons - or, even better, their rejection by all States.

After the traumatic experiences of the First World War, the Geneva Protocol was the first tangible expression of the conscious acknowledgement of the horror caused by chemical weapons. This Protocol, however, has not always proven to be sufficiently effective, hence the need for urgent steps towards the total banning of such weapons.

What I have been saying constitutes the rationale for the Italian Government's special activism in this field, starting with our February 1979 proposal concerning the establishment of an ad hoc working group for the thorough examination of a set of still unresolved problems - such as the purpose of the Convention, the destruction of arsenals, and the formulation of an international system of verification.

Our participation has always been guided by the hope and conviction that, step by step, we would come closer to achieving the final goal - as, indeed, has happened - of a convention envisaging the total prohibition of the production of new chemical weapons, anywhere and forever, as well as the complete destruction of existing arsenals, within well-defined time-limits.