

(Mr. Rasaputram, Sri Lanka)

... There is a widely shared optimism that a convention banning chemical weapons is within reach. The energetic and imaginative leadership of Ambassador Morel last year made noteworthy contributions to pave the way towards that goal. We are confident that under the able and dynamic leadership of Ambassador Hyltenius, the Ad hoc Committee will take decisive steps towards completing this task.

My delegation shares the view that most of the technical infrastructure of the convention is in place. Very useful work done last year on the annex on chemicals, the protocol on inspection procedures and the thorough and practical work on instrumentation has greatly contributed to this accomplishment. We are particularly pleased with the work on instrumentation ably chaired by the Finnish delegation. The outcome of this work indicated that the complex verification requirements of the convention could be expected to be met by the technological means available. We appreciate the initiative taken by Australia in bringing together private sector chemical industry and government representatives. It seems to us however that if we are to maintain the momentum generated by the Paris and Canberra conferences we have to take decisive steps towards completing the task without dampening the enthusiasm that has been aroused. The time has now come to address remaining issues in a political perspective with a view to arriving at speedy and lasting decisions through compromise, consultation and consensus. Ambassador Morel's cogent observations at the end of the Ad hoc Committee's session last year are still valid: "Our time is not infinite, and ... the convention now being finalized will produce practical results only if it is universal in its application." Technical competence alone will not facilitate the early conclusion of the convention.

We are inclined to believe that a time frame for the conclusion of the convention could now be considered as a via media for seeking solutions to remaining issues. The questions relating to scope, the composition and decision-making of the Executive Council, challenge inspection, assistance, the order of destruction, economic and technological development and the convention's relationship to the 1925 Geneva Protocol are issues which require political decisions in a spirit of compromise, bearing in mind the realities of desired universality. One could argue that these issues are politically interrelated in a manner that perhaps requires solutions in a package form during the terminal phase of negotiations. We therefore believe that a sense of timing should be infused into our negotiations in order to provide a proper framework for compromises. These efforts can take place parallel to the technical work that still has to be done in the working groups of the Ad hoc Committee. What must be avoided however is loss of focus in technical discussions risking reopening of the areas of agreement and convergence. The energetic efforts deployed by Ambassador Hyltenius to meet these challenges with a sense of realism give us hope and optimism.