

(Mr. Tindemans, Belgium)

reduction of the Soviet and United States strategic arsenals, establishment of conventional stability in Europe at a reduced level of forces (the opening at the start of next year of a new conference on this matter would make an essential contribution to the development of the efforts already being undertaken in the sphere of arms control); early conclusion of an agreement on the total prohibition of chemical weapons (at present, this is the main activity and, I would even say, the main responsibility of the Conference on Disarmament). These priorities, which should not be seen in a chronological order, cover all the areas in which efforts at arms control will certainly have to develop further. However, progress cannot be envisaged without first securing the preservation of what has already been achieved. I am thinking in particular of the ABM Treaty, an essential instrument if we wish to prevent the development of an arms race in outer space. The ABM Treaty clearly raises serious problems of interpretation that the parties will have to resolve among themselves. It does not appear reasonable to us to seek to put a veto on thinking about transition to a form of deterrence that would include more of a defensive element than is the case today. It goes without saying that the overall balance must not suffer from it and that stability must emerge strengthened to the benefit of all, if possible at a reduced level of forces.

All these areas -- space, strategic, nuclear and, finally, conventional weapons -- are closely linked, but each also has its own peculiar features and therefore requires specific treatment. Each negotiation should therefore be conducted in parallel as far as possible, without, however, giving rise to disequilibrium such as would challenge the internal consistency of the security system which each State is free to adopt in the light of its own geostrategic context. Substantial reductions in the nuclear arsenals of the two super-Powers, beginning with the elimination of INF, are possible and desirable without challenging that consistency. Similarly, we would all welcome total elimination of the chemical threat. There remains the issue of conventional weapons, which, in a way, is destined to dominate the arms control scene in the coming years, especially if the objectives that I have just mentioned in the nuclear and chemical areas are achieved, as I hope.

The Western defence system is based on an interrelationship between conventional and nuclear weapons. As the balance of forces now stands, for the allies to subscribe to a proposal for total denuclearization would be inconceivable. There is therefore a limit -- which I am not in a position to identify -- beyond which pursuit of reductions in nuclear capability would have the effect of threatening their security. It would, indeed, call in question the bases of the system of deterrence which for 40 years has proven that it continues to maintain peace.

I would now like to touch on issues which directly concern the work of the Conference on Disarmament, the most important of them being, to my mind, the prohibition of chemical weapons and the halting of nuclear tests. Belgium is of the view that the possibilities of progress, even success, are now real.

It is high time, more than 70 years after the first use of chemical weapons on Belgian soil, finally to put aside the mutual hesitations and suspicions which have so far impeded progress towards the concretization of a