

(Mr. van Schaik, Netherlands)

Three weeks ago I addressed nuclear issues and outer space in my first speech before this Conference. Today my intervention will be devoted to the other major issue of the Conference on Disarmament, chemical weapons.

I believe we all agree on the urgent character of the negotiations on chemical weapons. For too long the goal of a convention effectively and comprehensively banning chemical weapons has remained elusive.

It is obvious that, in particular with respect to the verification of the future ban, certain immensely difficult hurdles must be overcome. This prompts me to focus in my intervention on some general aspects of the role of verification in a chemical weapons ban, as well as on some of the main related problems.

Let me state at the outset that it is no surprise that questions of verification continue to present major obstacles in the search for a chemical-weapons agreement: chemical weapons have only too effectively been used throughout this century and even in the recent past we have been witness to the horror of chemical war. Chemical weapons have been and continue to be stockpiled in militarily relevant quantities, thus forming a threat to mankind. Eradicating chemical weapons would therefore amount to a major disarmament effort aiming at the removal of a redoubtable and viable weapons-system. It is only too understandable that for such an effort to be successful, confidence in the compliance with the provisions of the agreement should be assured. This can only be achieved in the form of a set of inevitably elaborate and in themselves unprecedented verification arrangements.

This alone would sufficiently explain the formidable task the present negotiators are confronted with. Unfortunately, however, there are other complicating factors inherent in the nature of chemical weapons themselves.

A great many potential chemical warfare agents and precursors thereof are produced in the civilian chemical industry and for perfectly permissible and legitimate purposes. On the one hand we recognize that measures to verify the non-production of those agents and precursors for hostile purposes in the civilian industry should not interfere with production for legitimate purposes -- production which takes place, moreover, in a highly competitive context. On the other hand we must insist that measures to contain and reduce the risk of circumvention or evasion of the rules are essential, especially in an area where possible loopholes appear to be abundant.