

Mr. KAHILUOTO (Finland): Mr. President, may I begin by congratulating you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament for the month of July. I am sure that the work of the Conference this month will greatly benefit from your experienced guidance. I am also very grateful for the warm words of welcome which you just addressed to me when giving me the floor.

I shall devote my statement to the issue of chemical weapons. A complete ban on chemical weapons is one of the foremost goals of international disarmament efforts. It is, to us, a priority item on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, and the subject of intensive negotiations.

This is rightly so. Chemical weapons are repugnant weapons of mass destruction. Innocent and unprotected civilians are at particular risk in the event of their use. Yet, chemical weapons are perceived to be militarily useful. A number of States are believed to possess chemical weapons, although only two States have so far openly acknowledged that they do. Moreover, many States, in the developed and developing world alike, possess the required industrial capabilities to manufacture lethal chemicals for weapons purposes. Clearly, the danger of proliferation exists. Indeed, it will grow unless effective steps are taken.

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