Remarks by H. E. Ambassador Li Song of China  
At the first CD Plenary Meeting of 2020  
(21 January 2019, Geneva)

Mr. President,

The Chinese delegation and I would like to extend to you our warmest greetings as you assume new functions in Geneva and become the first President of the Conference on Disarmament in 2020. This year is the Year of Rat in the Chinese Lunar calendar, marking the start of a new zodiac cycle. The Algerian Presidency also coincides with the beginning of a new cycle of rotating presidency in the CD. Most delegations here are placing great hopes on this new beginning. You can count on our full support as we work together to bring the work of the Conference back to the right track.

2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT and its 10th Review Conference is scheduled for next April in New York. All this makes it a special year for multilateralism and international arms control and non-proliferation. At present, the international political and security scene is going through profound and complex changes. Multilateralism is facing mounting onslaughts of unilateralist forces and the international arms control and non-proliferation regime is being undermined by repeated acts of sabotage, leading to fears that the international arms control and non-proliferation process is now going through its darkest hour since the end of the cold war. Where will the NPT regime and the multilateral arms control move from here? Indeed, in what direction is our Conference heading for? A huge question mark is hovering over the mind of most member states of the United Nations.
Although the work of the multilateral mechanisms in the UN has been seriously affected by the above-mentioned negative trends and the Conference was unable to adopt a programme of work, last year we also heard strong calls made at the UN General Assembly and here at the CD for safeguarding multilateralism and international regime for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation and for renewed efforts to revitalize existing international mechanisms in that field. This is the best response the international community can give to the present challenges facing it.

China maintains that at this critical juncture it is all the more important to take a clear stand in favour of multilateralism and the authority and efficiency of multilateral mechanisms, and of more dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect, equality and mutual trust involving the active participation of all countries, with no exceptions, least of all the big power who shoulders special responsibilities for international peace and security and who is not expected to play the role of a spoiler to our collective efforts and to withdraw from treaty regime.

People are saying that a new era has arrived for international arms control. I also share this view. Since we are in a new era, we should say goodbye to the old era, particularly by discarding the Cold War mindset which viewed everything through the prism of ideological confrontation between two blocs in a bi-polar world. In a new era, the multilateral arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation process calls for the universal participation of all countries with no exception. The big power who bears special responsibility for international peace and security should not put its narrow
interests first and exclude itself from the international community.

Mr. President,
The Conference again failed to adopt a programme of work last year. The blame should not be placed on the Conference, or on its rules of procedures or the programme of work. Most CD members now hope that this year the Conference will free itself from undue political interference, get back to its original basics and carry on with what we should be doing. We would welcome any effort undertaken by the P6+2 to consult with delegations in order to move us forwards and ensure greater continuity in CD’s work. We are ready to work with the P6+2 and other regional coordinators to move forward this process in a positive and constructive spirit. In my delegation’s view, this year, the Conference may proceed along two parallel tracks.

First, make full use of the mechanism of plenary meetings for member states to carry out frank, objective, in-depth and pragmatic discussions on a wide range of agenda items including how to look at the current international security situation, how to address the most prominent and pressing challenges in the field of international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, how to recognize the impact of emerging high-tech on global military revolution and international arms control and non-proliferation agenda. On the basis of the traditional agenda of the CD and through brainstorming, frank discussions and consensus-building, a way forward will be identified for this single, most authoritative multilateral disarmament negotiating body that best reflects the characteristics of the times and responds to its call.
Second, following the successful practice of 2018 of setting up subsidiary bodies on the key items on the CD’s agenda to carry out substantive work in preparation for eventual commencement of corresponding negotiations. I would like to emphasize here that a comprehensive and balanced approach should continue to be the fundamental guiding principle for our programme of work. The value and role of the CD lie in its ability to fully respect the legitimate concerns and reasonable demands of Member States. It should be pointed out that the CD was very close to agreeing on such a programme of work last year. We have every reason to believe that this goal will soon be within our grasp this year.

Mr. President,

At this time 40 years ago, the Chinese delegation came here for the first time to officially participate in the work of what was then the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament. In his inaugural speech made in this Chamber, the Chinese delegate at the time said that it was with a genuine desire to maintain world peace that China came to Geneva to negotiate; It is China’s sincere hope that CD will be able to follow the trend of history, reflect the aspirations of the peoples around the world and achieve progress that is conducive to maintaining world peace.

Over the course of past 40 years, China has always stood by the broadest members of the international community, and has been a staunch supporter, participant and contributor to the international arms control and non-proliferation process. Up till now, China has joined more than 20 major international instruments on multilateral arms control. We have been active in the work of the CD, and made important contributions to the negotiation of international arms control treaties, such as the CWC and CTBT. China is currently completing its
domestic legal procedure for accession to the Arms Trade Treaty and is expected to become full a member of the ATT within this year. China is committed to strengthening the P5 cooperation mechanism and promoting the establishment of a standing mechanism for exchanges and dialogues among the P5 on issues such as global strategic stability, nuclear doctrine and strategy. China has abided by the outcome documents of the past NPT review conferences. We have never turned our back on the NPT obligations and responsibilities of nuclear-weapon states. We have been working with vast member states to actively consolidate and strengthen the NPT mechanism so that the Treaty continues to play an irreplaceable role in international peace, security and development.

Mr. President,
No matter how grave the situation is and how much challenge we face, China will remain optimistic and confident. With a responsible and constructive attitude, China will deliver positive energy to the multilateral forums such as the UN, the CD, the NPT, the P5 and make fresh efforts to push forward the international arms control and non-proliferation process with practical actions. My team and I are ready to make our due contribution to the work of the CD.

I wish the CD success at this inaugural session.

I wish all of you a prosperous Chinese New Year and many happy returns for your families.

Thank you, Mr. President.