

**Remarks by H. E. Amb. Li Song of China
at the first Plenary Meeting of the 2021 Session of the
Conference on Disarmament**

(19 January 2021, Geneva)

Mr. President,

The Chinese delegation and I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the first Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in its 2021 session, and warmly welcome H.E. Amb. Mustafizur RAHMAN of Bangladesh, H.E. Amb. Lazhar SOUALEM of Algeria, H.E. Amb. Myint THU of Myanmar, H.E. Amb. C. A. Chandraprema of Sri Lanka, H.E. Amb. Héctor Constant ROSALES of Venezuela, H.E. Amb. Yuri STERK of Bulgaria, H.E. Amb. Juan Antonio QUINTANILLA of Cuba and H.E. Amb. Mxolisi Sizo NKOSI of South Africa. We are also very pleased to be part of the P6+2 this year and are ready to make active contribution towards moving the work of the CD back on track. China believes that all Member States of the United Nations have equal rights to participate in the work of multilateral arms control. We expect to see more countries to participate in the work of CD this year as observers, and support Your Excellency's efforts to maintain active consultations with parties concerned on the issue.

Before making my statement, however, I must voice my strongest opposition to and total rejection of the statement made by the United States just now, which contained some malicious accusations against China. We have responded on many occasions to such attacks over the past two years in many international fora, including the CD, with detailed elaboration of our relevant policies and propositions. The current US administration has gone to the extreme in telling lies and making damages in the field of international arms control. Their strange tales and absurd arguments will not overshadow the responsible nature of China's defense and arms control policy. Such

tricks of "a thief crying catching the thief" can never fly. The world has been fed up with them. Starting from tomorrow, hopefully the CD will not have to listen to such noise again. I believe this is also the collective wish of the CD membership. May I ask the Secretariat to put what I have just said on record.

Mr. President,

2020 was an extraordinary year for all of us. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic shook the world in every conceivable way. The international political and security environment that underpins our arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation efforts had to face the direst challenge since the end of the Cold War. In these difficult times when both the COVID-19 and political virus are wreaking havoc, the international community has begun to take a hard look at issues related to the future and destiny of mankind, including the overall international situation, the relations among major powers, multilateralism, as well as competition and cooperation, security and development. Now, as winter draws to a close and spring is around the corner, we have reached an important juncture in this reflective process and are starting to look towards the future. With the dawning of 2021, we are all the more determined to completely defeat the COVID-19 pandemic through solidarity and cooperation among all countries. We are also looking forward with confidence and anticipation to a new chapter in multilateralism and multilateral arms control. Here I would like to share with you three points of my reflections.

First of all, arms control must be based on its original purpose, and on strong trust and commitments. The original aspiration of arms control is to improve the security of all countries through international dialogue and cooperation, leading to equitable, common and universal security for all. Moves of arms control and disarmament that only serve one's own security interests at the expense of others', and that free itself while regulating others, will never be accepted by other

countries. Over the past century, along with changes in the international situation, the content and the mode of arms control and disarmament have undergone constant adjustment. However, its basis and objective always remain to be the maintenance of strategic balance and stability. While arms control needs to keep pace with the times, the course of history must not be reversed. As far as arms control in the new era is concerned, hegemonism, unilateralism, and exceptionalism are the most dangerous enemies. Cold War mentality, zero-sum game and power politics are the biggest obstacles. The existing international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation system, including the US-Russian bilateral disarmament treaty regime, constitutes an important part of the international security system, and should not be weakened or abandoned. It must instead be consolidated and enhanced. For that reason, the international community is placing high expectations on the United States to seize the last window to agree to extend the New START Treaty with Russia, and continue to fulfil the special and primary responsibility on nuclear disarmament as set out in the Final Document of SSOD-I and in the outcome of previous Review Conferences of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Secondly, enhancing mutual trust through more intensive dialogues is the top priority of the day. In recent years, the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation regime has suffered more damages than any time since the end of the Cold War. The root cause lies in the United States which has chosen to violate the principles of strategic balance and stability by regarding other countries as strategic rivals and by bringing ideological conflict into multilateral arms control in an attempt to launch a new cold war and build a new iron curtain. The so-called “Great Power competition” threatens world peace and stability. It has met strong resistance from a broad majority of the international community and will be swept aside by the march of history. To replace the dark winter with a bright spring, major countries need to engage in dialogues with each other, with a view to bringing their relations back on the right track and rebuild mutual confidence. China is actively pushing for P5 mechanism of dialogue and cooperation. It should become a major platform for more

intensive dialogues among them on a wide spectrum of issues relating to strategic security and stability, leading to a reduction of suspicions and enhanced confidence and cooperation. We are also ready to have bilateral dialogues with other P5 partners on strategic security and arms control with a positive and open-minded manner, since they will contribute to managing differences and broadening cooperation. Indeed, such dialogues should also be expanded internationally and be made a new spring fashion. In the video presentation of UNIDIR's fortieth anniversary, we have heard the slogan "dialogue matters" in different languages. Dialogue matters. It also works.

Thirdly, the Conference on Disarmament is not an arena for big power confrontation or an instrument for big countries to fix and regulate smaller ones. It is rather a vehicle to promote common security. As we all know, the lack of progress in the CD last year was attributable to both the COVID-19 and the political virus. In fact, the latter has done greater and longer harm, since COVID-19 has only impacted on the scale and format of our meetings while the political virus by the United States to other member States is the principal cause for derailing our proceedings over recent years. The Conference on Disarmament is the only multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations with a historic mission given by the SSOD-I. It should always reflect the fundamental principle of "undiminished security for all". All the CD members are equal irrespective of their sizes and should respect each other. Each and every member's legitimate security concerns and interests should be fully taken into account and addressed reasonably. Therefore, the work of the CD should progress on the basis of consensus and in a balanced and comprehensive manner. We will certainly extricate ourselves from the COVID-19. We also need to remove the political virus and draw lessons from the recent past in order to build consensus and confidence as we move forward.

Mr. President,

Because of the disruption caused by COVID-19 to our meeting schedule, this year we have in front of us an exceptionally heavy workload in the field of multilateral arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. The Tenth NPT Review Conference will undoubtedly be our priority. Even though the pandemic may continue to constrain our work this year, the Chinese delegation believes that the Conference on Disarmament has the obligation and is in a good position to proceed with its business in an orderly fashion, paving the way for a successful Tenth Review Conference. For our part, we are prepared to work on the basis of the draft package proposal presented by the P6 and engage in active consultations with other delegations with a view to reaching a comprehensive, balanced and commonly acceptable framework for the work of the CD, with corresponding calendar of meetings covering the establishment of subsidiary bodies to carry out substantive work on all important agenda items in preparation for future treaty negotiations. At the same time, all CD members should make the best use of its plenaries as a platform for in-depth discussions on new trends in the international political and security landscape, multilateral arms control and on the role of Conference itself as part of a collective search for a fresh common understanding compatible with the general security interests of its members. In addition, we also face a vital task of making the CD better respond to the needs of our times and the aspirations of the international community by looking at its methods of work, membership and key agenda items. The Chinese delegation is ready to join all others in carrying out serious discussions on those issues with an open and fresh mind.

Thank you, Mr. President.