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XV Amaldi Conference on
Problems on Global Security

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Opening remarks

On behalf of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and of its President Giovanni Conso, I have the honour and the pleasure to thank the Finnish Academy of Sciences, which is hosting the XVth Amaldi Conference on Problems of Global Security, and to welcome, on behalf of the Organizing Committee, the members of scientific academies and learned societies from all over the world who have accepted our invitation and are here today. The last point in the agenda of the first meeting of what, a few years later, would have been called the First Amaldi Conference, held in Rome in June 1988, dealt with The role of the scientific academies in the field of international security and disarmament, and ended with the question:

Is there a need for a wider scientific conference convened by the scientific academies on the subject?

The answer was affirmative, and The role of scientific academies became the topic of the opening speech, by W.K.H. Panofsky, of the Second Amaldi Conference, chaired by Edoardo Amaldi as the newly elected President of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, which was held in Rome from June 6 to June 9, 1989. Since then, the Amaldi Conferences have been held approximately every year in Rome, Cambridge, Heidelberg, Jablonna, Piacenza, Paris, Moscow, Mainz, Pontignano, and now here in Helsinki.

From the very beginning, the agendas of all the subsequent Amaldi Conferences shared a large common intersection. Problems concerned with the spreading and reconversion of fissionable material were already discussed in Rome in 1988 and, since then, have been present in all our meetings. Biological and chemical warfare appear already in the agenda of 1989 and have been a constant topic.

However, the profile under which these questions were considered has changed radically now. One of the main reasons for this change being the fact that, while in the early years the ideal counterparts to which we might think of addressing the results of our discussions were few clearly defined national or international institutions - with a particular attention to Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union - now the stage has become much wider, blurred and bleak.

Speaking - last year in Pontignano, during the XIVth Amaldi Conference - on The technical opportunities for a sub-national group to acquire nuclear weapons, and referring to potentially disruptive economic and political after effects of the developments following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon Building in Washington, Albert Narath concluded that:

in summary, the technical barriers standing in the way of sub-national nuclear weapon development are substantial but not likely to be insurmountable given sufficient time and resources. One can hope that terrorist groups having such capability would see reasons not to resort to mass destruction on such a massive scale to achieve their objectives. But at the end of the day, it

becomes quite clear that only an effective world-wide system of controls over fissile materials can give assurance that such nightmare will not come to pass.

In his abstract on Verification of compliance with biological weapons arms control agreements: the need for cooperation, presented in Pontignano in the same meeting, David Kelly noted that

the Biological Toxins Weapons Convention which entered into force in March 1975, remains a treaty without verification procedures despite considerable activity and effort since 1995 to establish a verification protocol, while concerns about biological weapons, especially in the hands of terrorists, have increased markedly in the same time frame.

In his lecture in Pontignano, Doctor Kelly elaborated at length on the realities, even on the semantics, of the word “verification”¹, and alluding to the Biological Weapons and Toxins Convention – which was signed by the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States in 1972 - concluded his report somewhat on the same line as Narath:

signature and ratification of the Biological Weapons Convention or any future protocol is not a guarantee of compliance. Investigation of compliance is technically and politically fraught, and I think both the trilateral agreement and the United Nations Commission’s investigations demonstrate that.(...)And throughout all of this, cooperation, both in terms of inspection processes and in terms of development of a protocol, is absolutely essential.

Looking back at our activity in the past fifteen years, we can perceive other specific topics brought to our attention, together with reports (discussed in so-called “open window sessions”) on general geopolitical and sociological questions and on the relevant economical consequences of arms control, of their limitation and reduction with respect to both conventional and non-conventional weapons, and on the impact of information technology on global security.

While the problem of land mines was discussed at length in Moscow in 1998, one of the main novelties of this XVth edition of the Amaldi Conferences is the section chaired by Jo Husbands and devoted to Small arms, to their impact on humanitarian crises, to government initiatives to curb their proliferation and misuse, to the role of civil society in fighting their spread.

The proceedings² of the Amaldi Conferences that have been published so far are the only permanent trace of our labours. They reflect the politically aseptic atmosphere of our

¹ *Verification. I always have great difficulty in knowing what verification actually is. I always innocently thought it was determining the truth, trying to find out whether a statement made by a country by his obligations under an arms control agreement was indeed a true statement. The U.N., when it deliberated verification some ten or twelve years ago now, decided that it actually was a process which established whether the state’s parties are complying with their obligation. And the process includes the collection of information relevant to the obligations undertaken by that treaty, and analysis of that information, and finally a judgement as to whether the specific terms of the agreement are being met.*

From the transcript of D.C. Kelly’s lecture in Pontignano, whose circulation has been authorized by Mrs. Janice Kelly, Dr. Kelly’s widow.

² They are the Proceedings of the Xth, XIth, XIIth, XIIIth and XIVth Amaldi Conferences, published respectively by the Fondation Singer-Polignac, Paris, in 1998, Nauka, Moscow, in 1999, the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities together with the Academy

meetings, which – in the past fifteen years – allowed scientists belonging to academic and national structures politically and ideologically quite far from each other to contribute freely to our discussions.

Although this atmosphere should be rigorously preserved, the question still exists, and might perhaps be discussed here, how to maximize the productivity of our meetings, how to inject them into some selected branch of the educational process: a process that, after all, is still the relevant part of the profession of many of us.