Statement to the Conference on Disarmament – Stalemate Cannot Continue

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Ambassador van der Kwast, President of the Conference on Disarmament, distinguished delegates.

I thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I would like to begin by congratulating Michael Moller on his appointment as Secretary-General of the Conference.

As this is the first time I have addressed you in my new role, I hope you will indulge me a moment. Whenever I visit this elegant Palais des Nations, I am always moved by the work of Jose Maria Sert that adorns the walls of this august chamber. It is an inspiring reminder of the potential humanity possesses to achieve great things. It is a reminder of the historic accomplishments produced by this body – the negotiation of treaties and accords that have made a lasting contribution to international peace and security.

The world needs a functioning Conference on Disarmament, now more than ever. In the words of the Secretary-General, the international community needs a Conference on Disarmament that helps us move towards a safer and more secure world.

Because ours is a world of growing instability. It lives in the shadow of nuclear weapons, continues to be victim to the atrocities of chemical weapons and is a daily witness to the horrors of war and violence.

Distinguished delegates,

The Secretary-General asked me to convey his best regards to all of you. He also wanted me to remind you of what he has, in this chamber, repeatedly asked you to do, four times over the past 8 years: To return to work. At his first personal engagement with this body in 2008, he said "The CD has accomplished a great deal- but its successes are distant memories. The CD must show progress now."

It has been nearly five years since the Secretary-General convened the High-Level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations, and four years since States met in New York for a follow-up meeting. Every year, the General Assembly passes a number of resolutions calling on the Conference on Disarmament to start substantive work.

Yet, the stalemate persists.

The failure of the NPT Review Conference to reach a consensus outcome – and the frustration felt by States parties – makes the imperative for the CD to break the two decade-long stalemate even more urgent.

The regrettable outcome of the Review Conference underscores the need for a functioning multilateral dialogue on the key issues of disarmament and non-proliferation, more, not less, than before.

As the world's sole disarmament negotiating body, the onus is now squarely on the Conference on Disarmament to bridge the divide between States – to get us back on the road to the elimination of nuclear weapons.
The Secretary-General once again asks you to move forward – and to move forward with urgency. As he told you last year, during the auspicious year of the blue horse: "Even though your mandate is to disarm, today, I say, arm yourself; arm yourself with the spirit of a blue horse and run. Run fast and run far."

Today I appeal to you to demonstrate flexibility, to devise innovative solutions and, above all, to rebuild the trust necessary to move forward.

As King Sejong the Great – a sage Korean leader and visionary who invented the Korean alphabets some 500 years ago – wisely noted: “One of the most essential ingredients of great statesmanship is trust, and especially expressing trust.”

Distinguished delegates,

I do appreciate that each of you has pressing national security concerns.

I also understand the importance many of you place on a consensus-based process when dealing with such important issues. But as the Secretary-General reminded this body in 2011, you must not let the process be stuck indefinitely. He called on you to put aside differences and serve global interests toward building a safer world. On many occasions, the disarmament agenda has proven that international solutions can be consistent with enlightened national self-interests.

Distinguished delegates,

We all share the goal of a world, free of nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, as was highlighted by the NPT Review Conference, there is a growing rift in how and when to achieve this.

I want to take this opportunity to recall the Secretary-General’s five-point proposal on nuclear disarmament. The Plan, released in 2008, outlined complementary approaches.

The salient points are:

- First, the need for negotiations on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament;

- Second, the need for non-nuclear weapon states to receive unambiguous assurances that they would not be subject to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons;

- Third, the need to bring into force all legal instruments in the field of nuclear disarmament as well as to consolidate and further establish nuclear weapon free zones;

- Fourth, the need for increased transparency by the nuclear weapon states; and
- Fifth, and finally, the need for complementary measures that would support the disarmament process, including the elimination of other types of weapons of mass destruction and efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring WMD.

Some significant progress has been made. But we still have a long way to go. We need to be realistic in pursuing tangible steps while continuing to aim high. These approaches remain pertinent today and are particularly relevant for the Conference on Disarmament. The Secretary-General reminded you to face the realities of the 21st century. The CD can be a driving force for building a safer world and a better future. This is the very mission of the CD.

Distinguished delegates,

In 2012, the General Assembly\(^1\) tasked a Group of Governmental Experts to make recommendations on possible aspects that could contribute to but not negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The group has now agreed on a consensus report\(^2\) which, inter alia, reaffirmed the Shannon mandate as the most suitable basis for negotiations. The General Assembly will consider the report at its next session later this year. I understand this report has also been transmitted to the Conference and I hope that you will consider the report a useful contribution and one which can advance your deliberations.

It is encouraging that your substantive discussions on the four core issues of the Conference’s agenda are continuing. Your continued readiness to explore all avenues to agree on a Programme of Work and the recent re-establishment of the Informal Working Group on this topic are also welcome.

In this regard, I thank the Coordinators for each substantive core agenda issue, Ambassador Ramadan of Egypt, Ambassador Biontino of Germany, Ambassador Rowland of the United Kingdom and Ambassador Aryasinha of Sri Lanka. My gratitude also goes to Ambassador Kairamo of Finland, who has agreed to co-chair the Informal Working Group with a mandate to produce a programme of work.

I hope the Conference will give due consideration to how to make this body as effective as possible. Any rules and practices that could be improved to support your work should be considered if they can help lift the Conference on Disarmament out of its current stalemate.

Distinguished delegates,

Despite fatigue over the prolonged stalemate, there still exists widespread support for the Conference on Disarmament as the venue of choice for future disarmament negotiations.

\(^1\) A/RES/67/53

\(^2\) A/70/81
The international community is looking eagerly to the Conference to validate that support. Continued stalemate is not an option. As the Secretary-General said last year, "do not wait for others to move. Be the first mover."

I began my statement by commenting on the interior of this chamber. I will end by noting one of the quotes carved into its exterior: “The Nations Must Disarm or Perish”.

That statement is as relevant today as it was in the aftermath of the First World War.

I trust you will do your utmost to ensure this Conference fulfills the vision of that statement.

Thank you so much.