Remarks to the Conference on Disarmament

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High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Geneva
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Ambassador Piotr Stachanczyk,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be back to address the Conference on Disarmament and grateful for the kind words of welcome addressed to me. I congratulate Ambassador Stachanczyk on the assumption of the CD Presidency at this critical juncture. I also want to join other speakers in expressing deep appreciation to the Finnish, Israeli and Swiss Permanent Representatives for their contribution and wishing all the best for their future work.

At the outset, I wish to pay tribute to the activism and creativity of the Presidents of the 2016 session. These efforts also elicited new proposals by Member States, seeking to ensure that the Conference remains relevant and that its work keeps up with current developments and challenges in the field of disarmament. I believe today’s lively debate, which I personally witnessed, is a testimony to the shared commitment of the CD members to keep its relevance.

I believe this has brought us closer than we have been in quite some time to reaching agreement on a programme of work.

I must also pay tribute to the Secretary-General of the Conference, Michael Møller, through Mary Soliman, Deputy-Secretary-General, for his continuing personal efforts to enhance the engagement of civil society in the Conference.

The second civil society forum, convened last week, succeeded in doing something that has been elusive in your official work – it brought critical issues of emerging technologies and cross-cutting concerns of sustainable development to the centre of your deliberations.

Yet, the need for such an informal meeting should remind us that the integration of civil society into the work of some multilateral disarmament bodies remains behind the curve.

In surveying the struggles of the CD to achieve any outcome at all in two decades, I can only make the observation that no recent multilateral disarmament process has succeeded – or indeed even been initiated – without the full participation and contribution of civil society.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The slow pace of disarmament and the persistent paralysis in standing multilateral bodies has led many to question the relevance and effectiveness of traditional approaches and processes. But this is not a new development.

Over the past ten years, the General Assembly has taken up some of the core items on the CD’s agenda to help facilitate forward movement.

I must be frank with you. It seems, unfortunately, that addressing these issues outside the CD has become the new normal.
Business-as-usual is not sustainable. Without the hope of a credible path to nuclear zero an increasing number of non-nuclear-weapon States appear ready to pursue new legal measures.

The nuclear-weapon States bear the main burden in finding a way to return to arms control – and not arms competition – as the most suitable means to address rising international tension.

Without progress on the implementation of long-outstanding disarmament commitments, tensions are likely to grow between those who feel that nuclear weapons are too dangerous to serve as a legitimate means of security and those who continue to rely on nuclear weapons in their military doctrines.

In May, I appealed to the open-ended working group to continue its work to narrow the gap. To achieve the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, we must find a way to reach common ground while respecting differences. It requires intensified dialogue and a shared understanding that compromise need not involve the sacrifice of agreed objectives, common values, or solemn principles.

Ultimately, we can only arrive at our final destination through an inclusive process. Reviving an inclusive process requires sincere engagement by all stakeholders, both nuclear haves and have-nots, starting from listening more attentively to each other’s views. All of us need to go back to the basics of dialogue.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The international community has not given up on the CD. Efforts pursued outside this body have so far aimed at facilitating the work of the Conference and not replacing it.

But time is pressing. The Conference cannot afford to fail again.

It is imperative that agreement on a programme of work is reached. If not, pressure will mount for seeking alternative forums.

The CD must rise to the challenge if it is to preserve its unique status as the single standing negotiating body on disarmament

The entire international community is watching

I count on your collective wisdom as you prepare for the final part of the 2016 session under the able leadership of Ambassador Stelanczyk. I hope you will be able to build on the momentum in the coming days and weeks to produce a meaningful result.

Thank you.