



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

Conference on Disarmament

Statement delivered by Amb. Leonardo Bencini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 19 May 2022

Mister President,

Thank you for giving me the floor and for your warm welcome. It is an honour for me to address the Conference on Disarmament for the first time at today's Plenary and to seat between you, distinguished colleagues, as the new Permanent Representative of Italy.

At the outset, I would also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary General of the Conference, Ms. Valovaya, and to the Secretariat.

Mister President,

When I was appointed to this new position, a question came to my mind about what concrete and realistic opportunities disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control have in today's world. The current international security landscape is deeply worrying and it is not a secret that while we are gathered here, tensions and geopolitical rivalry are increasing all around the world.

For almost three months now, a massive scale war has been brought to Europe. Italy condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, which is a blatant violation of international law and humanitarian principles. We stand firmly in support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and in full solidarity with the Ukrainian people. We call on

Russia to immediately cease hostilities, ensure safe passage to civilians, and refrain from any action that may affect civilian and critical infrastructures or nuclear facilities.

While we cannot turn a blind eye and ignore the atrocity of the war, it is time for us to double our efforts to promote meaningful dialogue and negotiations, with a view to a shared and sustainable solution to this conflict and to any other situation that could compromise international peace and security.

Mister President,

Under these circumstances, a revival of the Conference on Disarmament is needed and urgent, as disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control play a crucial role in the security landscape. I fully understand and share the sense of frustration stemming from the long impasse in the Conference's work. At the same time, the CD is an indispensable and unique body in the toolbox of the disarmament community, even though its potential remains unfulfilled.

It is up to us to preserve and relaunch the role of the Conference. We should recognize that it would be difficult to make any progress by going backward to old approaches. Instead, our work needs to adapt to new circumstances, to recognise the new layers of risk. We should use this platform to enhance dialogue and transparency, to overcome ambiguity and misperceptions that make the global atmosphere increasingly polarized and confrontational rather than collaborative.

In this vein, the on-going work of the Subsidiary This reflect a constructive approach that allows a debate on substantive areas, without protracted procedural discussions instead.

Mister President,

Please allow me to briefly touch on three Italian priorities that I would like to underline.

1) In a few months, we will be participating in the tenth Review Conference of the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**.

Italy shares the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons. The NPT, with its three mutually reinforcing pillars, remains the cornerstone of the global nonproliferation regime. Given the difficult geopolitical and security environment, it is clear that this is a long-term project to be attained through an inclusive and progressive approach. However, difficulties are not impossible to overcome, especially if we are able to show political will and leadership.

We should work to reinvigorate the role of the CD for nuclear disarmament as a forum to enhance and expand dialogue on strategic issues. An important step that concerns us all in this room should be the immediate beginning of negotiations on a Treaty banning the production of fissile material. Last December, the General Assembly approved by a vast majority an important Resolution on this issue. We cannot ignore this appeal anymore and a collective effort is needed to make further progress. Pending the conclusion of such a Treaty, all concerned States should abide by a moratorium.

2) Prevention of an arms race in outer space has been an agenda item of the Conference on Disarmament for a long time and it is a very important one for Italy.

Today more than ever, there is a need to promote greater international cooperation to prevent outer space from becoming an arena of conflict.

While recognising the invaluable role played by the existing legal framework governing space activities, Italy believes that norms, rules and principle of responsible behaviours should be elaborated and put in place in order to promote security, safety and sustainability in outer space. The adoption of voluntary measures and commitments of a non-legally binding nature could be an important intermediate step in maximising the chances of a successful outcome of future negotiations for a binding treaty.

We therefore encourage further dialogue on this issue, including presenting at the CD our respective national space security policies, strategies or doctrines, as Italy did last year. In the same vein, we welcome the constructive and productive work of the open-ended working group on space threats that has started last week, in Geneva.

3) Last but not least, I am honored that the States Parties to the **Biological Weapons Convention** have agreed to designate me to preside over the upcoming ninth Review Conference.

The BWC is of the utmost importance to ensure bio-security and bio-safety. Every possible effort should be made to strengthen its regime and ensure its full and effective implementation. States Parties can count on my personal commitment for listening to their views and considering all the proposals and priorities, in order to reach a common understanding of what should be a successful outcome.

In the year when we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the Convention, we should remember and be inspired by the spirit that allowed the members of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament to overcome their differences.

Mister President,

To conclude, I would like to come back to that question I was referring in the beginning of my statement: what space do we have today for disarmament? My answer is that, even in difficult times - or, better said, especially in difficult times - diplomacy must not stop. It is under the most difficult circumstances that we need to redouble our efforts. We cannot afford the price of a stalemate in the CD anymore and the Conference still has a crucial role to play.

We need to remember to ourselves the special responsibility that we bear in this body and the urgency to act with determination. We need a collective renewed commitment to strengthen the CD and guarantee its proper functioning, avoiding to enter the path of a new arms race in any domain.

And I am convinced that a well-functioning Conference also implies to ensure adequate representation for women. We thank you for your proposals aimed at promoting consensus on a technical update of the Rules of Procedure of the CD to reflect the equality of women and men and we hope to be able to reach agreement on what I believe it should be just a quick linguistic correction.

On these issues as on any other proposal that would allow to strengthen the work of the Conference, Mister President, you can count on the support of my Delegation and myself.

Thank you Mister President.