



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

Conference on Disarmament
Thematic discussion on a comprehensive programme of disarmament
delivered by Amb. Leonardo Bencini,
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 17 August 2023

Mr President,

let me first of all congratulate you and thank you for the work that you have done during this Presidency. We have truly appreciated it.

I would also like to express appreciation for the participation in this meeting, earlier this morning, of Director-General and Secretary-General of the CD Ms Volovaya. Her support is very precious for our efforts to revitalise this body.

Mr President,

Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. I would like to make further comments in my national capacity.

I would like to thank you and the previous President, the Ambassador of France, for organising last June the Montreux retreat on the revitalisation of the Conference on Disarmament. We also appreciated the excellent work conducted by UNIDIR to provide a compilation of proposals that will be very useful in future and also for summarizing the rich exchange of views we had in Montreux. We warmly welcomed this exercise as soon as it was proposed and we support the continuation here of the discussions that we started in that informal context. This is all the more important as we are preparing for the 2024 Summit of the Future. As part of the preparations for this Summit, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has recently released the “New Agenda for Peace” policy brief. It is a document that places disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation firmly back on the peace and security agenda. Among the various ideas put forward, that of the reform of the disarmament machinery merits attention, as it clearly comprises the issue of the revitalization of the CD in which we are all engaged. We as members of this Conference must play an active role in this exercise and have our voice heard.

In Montreux we discussed many ideas, from simple practical changes to major reforms. It is perhaps, at this point in time, unrealistic to embark on a wide restructuring of the disarmament machinery. However, we believe that at least we should begin to discuss the feasibility of certain ideas so that, when the time comes, we will be prepared, if we so agree, to implement them. Sooner or later we will have another SSOD-IV. Italy believes that, first of all, we will have to harmonise and streamline the entire disarmament machinery. We must look at the respective mandates of the CD and UNDC and review them accordingly to create a consistent system that avoids overlapping and duplication and most of all that ensures representativeness and inclusivity. We should also look at the possibility of bringing the UNDC to Geneva, or at least have alternate sessions here. While bearing in mind the different nature of these bodies – a negotiating body as opposed to a deliberative one – the idea of merging them was also mentioned at the retreat and we should not dismiss it single-handedly. In any case, we think we should enhance and strengthen the role of Geneva as the disarmament capital.

Mr President,

The international context has dramatically changed since the last enlargement of the CD and since the last agreement that was negotiated in this body, almost thirty years ago. The CD is no longer small enough to be effective and not large enough to be representative. There are disarmament issues in which every country, and not just those present in the CD, has a stake. Think of military use of artificial Intelligence or Outer Space. But this year marked a new low, with the absence of observer countries. Italy believes that every country who is a member of the UN General Assembly should have the right to participate in the works of the CD as an observer. This would eliminate the need for approval at every session. If they are entitled to full UN membership, why should they be barred to observe the works of the CD? Also, many of those countries pay their share of the UN budget that goes also towards this Conference but they cannot have their voice heard here. This goes against the principle of no taxation without representation.

Other minor improvements of the CD that we discussed in Montreux could be easily implemented, most of them without even changing the rules of procedure. We should re-establish an effective relationship with the General Assembly. The CD should take in full consideration, and discuss, the recommendations emanating from the General Assembly. On the other hand, the General Assembly should pay more attention and consideration to the reports of the CD. The Chair of the First committee and the chairs of the various OEWG and GGE should come regularly to the CD and report on the works of the respective bodies. The CD should have regular special public and formal sessions for civil society, NGOs and the private sector. It should also interact more and better with the rest of the UN system. Representatives of other UN organizations should also come to this forum to inform us of their activities. One of the limitations of the CD is exactly this lack of

interaction. Let us not forget that the overall goals of the international community are peace and security and the sustainable development goals of the 2030 agenda. From this point of view, disarmament is a means to an end, to a safer and prosperous world for all.

We support any proposals to change the high-level segment in ways that make it more interactive and appealing also for our political leaders to take part.

We should also look at the possibility of bringing more continuity and consistency to the Presidency of the CD. Among the possible changes mentioned in Montreux, that of extending the term from one to two or three months so that we would have three-four Presidencies a year, seemed the least problematic. In any case, we welcome UNODA's engagement to enhance continuity between Presidencies even within the current system of alphabetical rotation.

A minor but to us very important change should be made to the rules of procedure to ensure that they are gender-neutral. It does not make sense in 2023 to refer to the President as "He". Linguists have already provided proposals on what to change. I understand that there might be various ways of ensuring this depending on the language but certainly this could be done with the English version. This is a technical change and I do not see on what grounds anyone should oppose it.

Mr President,

The CD is in a deadlock. This is something that no one can deny. We share the view expressed by many delegates that this just a reflection of the current international context and that there is nothing we here, delegates at the CD, can do about this. It is not the fault of this body or of its rules of procedure. But if there are changes that we can introduce in our works then we must do it. Or at least we must discuss every possibility in an open manner, without any preconditions. I understand some member states are cautious as they fear changes that might even endanger this body and its negotiating function. But we are not negotiating now, are we, and this body is not functioning as it was mandated to do. Not doing anything at this point in time might be the worst option. We need new ideas and new approaches. They do not have to be bold or sweepingly innovative. Even small changes will send the right signal of engagement and they might help set this body back in motion. That is why discussions like those we had in Montreux are very useful. You can count on Italy to continue these discussions on concrete proposals over the next few months and years.

Thank you.