



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

Conference on Disarmament

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

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Thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the floor.

Let me congratulate you on being the first President of the 2024 session of the Conference on Disarmament. You can count on my Delegation's full support, both in this room and in any informal consultations that you may consider necessary. We praise the transparent and constructive approach you have adopted, including within the P6+2 format, in which we take part. As Italy will be the first CD Presidency in 2025, it follows that we look at these first meetings of the CD and at your Presidency with keen interest, in the hope that we will be able to replicate at the next session any positive outcome that can be achieved this year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express appreciation for the participation of the CD's Secretary General, Ms Tatyana Volovaya, in today's meeting earlier today. I also wish to bid farewell to Ambassador Villegas and to welcome all the new Ambassadors to the CD.

Mr. President,

Italy aligns itself with the comprehensive statement delivered by the European Union. I would like now to make some remarks in my national capacity.

We are increasingly concerned at the gradual erosion of the disarmament architecture that we have witnessed in particular over the last couple of years, after the beginning of Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, a war that we condemn in the strongest possible terms and will continue to condemn for as long as it lasts. Since then, the Russian Federation has issued threats of use of nuclear weapons; purportedly "suspended" the New START Treaty; illegally seized the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, putting at risk the safety and security of the entire region; blocked consensus at the X NPT Review Conference; blocked consensus on a Final report of the OEWG on space; withdrawn from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe;

announced deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus and withdrawn its ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

This is a long list of measures and declarations that run counter to the very nature of the work we carry out here – indeed, to our mission in this body. As if those measures and declarations were not enough, over the past couple of years, we have seen Russia abusing the consensus rule to block key decisions in various disarmament forums and using all procedural means in bad faith simply to obstruct the full participation of the European Union and other international organisations in those same forums.

We see the concrete risk that current geopolitical tensions coupled with mistrust are pushing the world towards a new arms race, including a nuclear arms race. We are deeply concerned at the threats to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. A new arms race would go against decades of international efforts in arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

In spite of all the above – in fact, *because of* all the above – Italy believes there is a strong need to strengthen the multilateral system. Only through a solid multilateral system we can tackle today’s global problems effectively, including those of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. This is why we remain firmly committed to preserving and enhancing the multilateral disarmament machinery, beginning with the Conference on Disarmament.

Mr. President,

One of the most salient aspects of last year’s session was the debate we had on the revitalisation of this body under the French and German CD Presidencies. The retreat in Montreux, followed by an informal debate, provided a useful opportunity to discuss both small, practical steps to improve the way this body works, as well as possible longer-term, structural reforms. This debate was very useful also as a way for the Geneva disarmament community to contribute ideas and proposals to the process towards the Summit of the Future, taking into account the Secretary General’s reflections in his “New Agenda for Peace”. There is clearly a need to put disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation back on top of the international agenda, as an essential component of the peace and security pillar of the United Nations – indeed, of the overall multilateral system.

Italy supports the convening, at the appropriate time and with modalities to be defined, of a Fourth special session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament (SSOD-IV), with a mandate, inter alia, of reforming the CD. While it is, at this point in time, unrealistic to embark on a sweeping reform, we believe that we should at least 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.

Italy believes there is scope – again, when the time is right – to look at the mandate of this body and see whether it is still fit for purpose in this day and age. The CD as it is today was conceived over forty years ago. The world has changed since then – in fact, it has changed twice, first with the end of the Cold War and now with this new period of international tensions that puts under intense strain the architecture built over decades. Is the CD fit, for instance, for a world where security threats are diffuse and difficult to categorise? Is it fit for a world where Artificial Intelligence will soon influence, in ways we today struggle to fathom, tomorrow’s security? Is a 65-member CD a representative enough body to negotiate treaties that concern the entire international community? Indeed, is a 65-member body still a good idea, a body that is no longer small enough to be effective and not large enough to be representative and equitable? These are all questions at the core of our presence here, and of the need to break an almost thirty-year deadlock.

Italy believes in inclusiveness and we support expansion of the membership of the CD. The consideration of many requests for admission is still pending after many years. We support the proposal for the appointment of a Special Coordinator or Rapporteur to collect the view of Member States and review the issue of membership.

In line with this approach, Italy believes that every country that has full membership in the UN General Assembly and enjoys full rights in that body should also have the right to participate in the works of the CD as an observer. This would eliminate the need for approval at every session. Besides, all UN member States pay their share of the UN budget that goes also towards this Conference; still, they cannot have their voice heard here. This goes against the very basic legal principle of no taxation without representation.

Mr. President,

Other minor improvements to the CD 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 into 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 OEWGs and GGEs 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.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretariat for taking the first small but concrete steps to improve the way this body works. I refer in particular to the re-introduction of the Yellow Book and the establishment of the e-Delegates portal. Now

it is up to Member States to come up with similar small but concrete steps and implement them.

Let me just mention a perhaps minor but to us very important and symbolic change that we could make and, that we, as others, have raised time and time again. It does not make sense in 2024 to refer to the President as “He” in the English language version of the Rules of procedure. 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,

In conclusion, we are ready to discuss a programme of work that could help us make progress on certain issues. For us, the beginning of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty remains the top priority for this body. We understand the concerns of some delegations on this particular question but we believe there could be ways to take those concerns into consideration. Starting a negotiation does not in itself prejudge its outcome. There should be a certain level of flexibility that would allow us to move forward, at the same time safeguarding the legitimate interest of any given Member State.

There are other issues on which it would possible, if we so wish, to reach consensus on the start of negotiations. We have to break out of the pattern of conflicting priorities that end up blocking any progress. It is a pattern we all know too well, and to which we have become accustomed. Italy stands ready to work with you, Mr. President, and with any CD member State to find a concrete and pragmatic way to break this deadlock.

I thank you, Mr. President.