



Delegation of Italy to
the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva

Conference on Disarmament
Agenda Item 6: Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament
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Statement delivered by Ambassador Leonardo Bencini
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President,

Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. I would like to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

At the outset, let me thank you and the panelists for this thematic debate on the relationship between disarmament and development under agenda item 6, entitled “Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament”. As in 2023, agenda item 6 provides us with a flexible tool to include various new issues for discussion at the CD. Last year this was the case for the revitalization of the CD but also for gender and artificial intelligence. We share the view that – while never losing sight of our role as the single negotiating body on disarmament – we should discuss all issues that can be relevant to the functions of this body, and especially new ones as they can improve the way the Conference on Disarmament reacts to new trends and new concerns. Given the circumstances, this is perhaps the best way to assure the continuing relevance of the CD.

As far as the relationship between disarmament and development is concerned, we believe it is a crucial issue not only for the multilateral disarmament machinery but also in the widest framework of the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda.

I would like to quote the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, who some days ago addressed the UN General Assembly in New York during the High-Level Conference

entitled "Peace, Justice and Institutions for Sustainable Development". Italy is proud to have a recognized lead on SDG16 on inclusive and just societies and rule of law, having organized SDG16 multi-stakeholder conferences in Rome every year from 2019 to 2023. This year this Conference took place in New York. On this occasion President Mattarella stated that "Peace, inclusion, and justice are the irreplaceable pillars in sustainable development" and warned that too many "conflicts are gobbling up enormous resources into the arms race, deallocating them from development".

President,

Disarmament is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. The end is a peaceful, more secure and prosperous planet. The shared primary objective of the international community is the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. It somehow strikes us that the 2030 Agenda does not contain a specific goal or target on disarmament as this is a fundamental component of the security pillar in the overall international agenda. Disarmament can in fact play a fundamental role. It can create an environment conducive to development by reducing the risk of armed conflict and freeing up resources that would otherwise be spent on weapons and military expenditures. In turn, development can contribute to disarmament by addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to basic services and opportunities. Additionally, investing in development programs can help build more resilient societies that are better equipped to address the challenges of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. That is why Italy is profoundly convinced that disarmament plays a crucial role in promoting peace and development by mitigating the risks of armed conflict and building trust among countries, strengthening governance and enhancing human security.

Unfortunately, the current state of disarmament negotiations, including the work that the CD is mandated to carry out, does not seem to fully live up to this crucial role. It is true that this stalemate is in no small part a reflection of the current international context, where mutual trust is at an all-time low and military aggression has happened again in Europe, with Russia's brutal war against Ukraine. This gravely affects the security equation in Europe and elsewhere and, by consequence, all related disarmament efforts. And let us not forget that, as already mentioned by several other speakers, rather than focusing solely on the costs incurred in military spending, we should consider mainly the costs of conflict – the human and economic costs of conflict. When military spending helps prevent conflicts, this effect should be duly taken into account.

President,

As pointed out earlier by the UK Ambassador, the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) contain provisions to promote international cooperation for the peaceful uses respectively of nuclear energy and biotechnology. This is a clear example of how the relationship between disarmament instruments and international cooperation and development has been clear to all for decades.

As a concrete example, within the Working Group on the strengthening of the BWC we are working to create a mechanism on international cooperation and assistance (ICA) and one on science and technology (S&T). We see as the main goal of these mechanisms the strengthening of the capabilities of lower and middle income countries in the biological field, to contribute to their economic and technological development.

Another concrete example is demining and the contribution that it brings to the promotion of economic and social development in affected countries. Clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance makes areas safe for agriculture and residential and infrastructural development, and this is all essential for economic growth. Moreover, many areas affected by landmines are rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage and clearing these areas could create opportunities for the development of tourism-related businesses, generating income for local communities. Last but not least, demining projects require a skilled workforce, providing employment opportunities for local people. Overall, demining activities play a crucial role in laying the groundwork for sustainable economic and social development in affected countries by removing barriers to growth and fostering peace and stability. These are all useful lessons that can be applied to other areas of disarmament.

I thank you President.