



**Statement delivered by Ambassador Leonardo Bencini,
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament to
the 2026 session of the Conference on Disarmament, General Debate**

Geneva, 20 January 2026

Madam President,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of the CD and let me assure you of Italy's full support. In the run-up to this meeting, we have already had opportunities to discuss informally with you and several other delegations how best to approach this year's session of the Conference on Disarmament. We fully stand behind you to ensure a decision on the way forward is taken at the earliest opportunity.

I will focus my statement on concrete questions concerning the CD, rather than on broader substantive issues. For those, I refer to the statement delivered a short while ago by Poland on behalf of the European Union, with which we of course fully align.

Madam President,

A year ago, we were in your position. We benefited from the work that had been conducted by the previous six Presidencies in 2024 and from the collective engagement of the P6+2 format. Some extra effort and further negotiations in December 2024 and January 2025 made it possible to confirm

the decision on the establishment of subsidiary bodies. By the end of the second week of the session, on 30th January, we adopted decision 2443 whereby we reestablished subsidiary bodies, appointed the respective coordinators and defined a calendar of meetings for the entire session. It was the first time that such a decision was taken in January since 1996, and the sixth time it was taken at all during the same period, and in these six times I also include 2024 when the decision was adopted only at the end of the session and we had no time for substantive work.

We believe that the 2025 agreement was important and perhaps has been a little underestimated. It showed that, in spite of everything, some form of consensus was still possible within the CD, that we are not so completely paralyzed as some argue. True, we are still not fulfilling our negotiating mandate. But as we have remarked more than once, the current international context is perhaps the least conducive to an agreement on this, and on top of that we of course have the well-known, decades-old differences on specific disarmament issues. We have to be realistic. We cannot and should not expect a breakthrough and therefore should not feel frustrated if there isn't any. We believe that what we achieved at the beginning of the 2025 session was as far as we can go at this point in time. Therefore, it is our firm belief that, all things considered, the wisest way forward – and I appeal to all delegations in this respect – is simply to repeat last year's template. Any change to this template would reopen a long debate, in fact it would represent the same debate we had at the end of last year's session on final reports, and it would lead to nothing. This is why we fully support the President's efforts in trying to reestablish subsidiary bodies exactly along the same lines as last year in a spirit of continuity.

Continuity means not starting from scratch every year. It is time-consuming and a waste of resources to have to renegotiate at every session what we intend to do during the time available to us. This is also why last year's template could be very useful, also from a practical point of view. But there are also some lessons to be drawn from last year's session in terms of the work conducted by the Subsidiary bodies.

We believe that the debate we had within these bodies was useful and clearly indicated possible areas of convergence – not many but certainly some – as well as the issues where differences remain and how far apart positions are. This is why this debate is useful. If we did not have this debate, we would not be able to take the pulse of member states on key disarmament and non-proliferation issues. The debate we had within the subsidiary bodies, in an informal setting, was also useful because it was frank, serious, interactive and thorough. We need this kind of in-depth discussion, even if we do not negotiate. We need to know where we stand so that, when we are ready, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, we can start again our negotiating function.

While our view of last year's work is essentially positive, there are some lessons to learn from that experience. The lack of consensus on final reports for the SBs created a sense of failure and frustration. This, we believe, was unnecessary. Rather than insisting on finding consensus on final reports, we should have simply ended our meetings with a recap session and agree to resume the debate in 2026. This is why the principle of continuity is so important – not only to build on the work we conduct but also to avoid the sense of failure I have just mentioned, which only feeds frustration. Also, we should not consider the adoption of a report is the only yardstick of work accomplished and results achieved. This is a self-limiting and short-sighted approach, that focuses on the attainment of contingent, formal goals – the adoption of a written document – losing sight of the longer-term objective which is to gradually pave the way for the resumption of our institutional mandate. If we do manage to reestablish subsidiary bodies this year – provided, of course, we still have the respective coordinators – we think we should decide at the outset how we will conclude our work or rather pause it to resume it next year. Rather than trying to adopt a report, which would prove equally elusive this year as it was last year, we should simply hold an informal recap session for coordinators to present their findings, followed by a formal section for comments from delegations. And we would take it from there at the next session.

While I have the floor, I would like to add some comments also on the issue of the CD's composition. The CD as it is now was created in 1978 and was gradually expanded subsequently. The world is very different now from what it was almost fifty years ago. The CD membership does no longer reflect the current state of international affairs. It is too large to be effective and too small to be representative. There have been requests of membership pending for many years. And at every session we disagree on which countries to accept as observers. Let me make one point clear: Italy believes that every country requesting it should be allowed to take part in the work of the CD as an observer. By default, every country should be admitted. We do not think that it is helpful or opportune to keep certain countries out for reasons extraneous to our work, basically for political reasons. We commend the coordinating role of IGOS, the informal group of observer states, and encourage it to continue to make its voice heard, especially if this year, as in past years, a considerable number of countries from the European Union are blocked from participating as observers.

Madam President,

While this is most likely not the right time to embark on sweeping reforms of the multilateral disarmament architecture – such as those which could be discussed at an SSOD IV – the UN80 initiative should provide us with the incentives to consider what we could also do to contribute to a more efficient system. There are some simple measures that could be taken that would go in this direction. Almost three years ago, in June 2023, under the French and German presidencies of the CD we had a very constructive debate on the revitalisation of the CD. We think it is now the time, after nearly three years, to resume that discussion.

As I said, our goal is to gradually pave the way for the resumption of our negotiating mandate. Italy's priority for the CD remains the beginning of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. This is in fact a priority for very many delegations and it is long overdue. We are ready to consider beginning negotiations also on other issues, if this helps break the stalemate.

However, we should be careful not to remain hostage to the all-or-nothing approach. While, ideally, we should strive for a comprehensive and balanced program of work, it might be unrealistic to imagine the CD taking on the considerable workload of negotiating more than two instruments at the same time. For this reason, we believe that the balance of a possible program of work should be the primary criterion, rather than its comprehensiveness. Identifying one issue or perhaps two that could be acceptable to all delegations seems to us the most realistic way to attempt to break the almost thirty-year deadlock.

I thank you, Madam President.