



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

Geneva, 17 March 2026

President,

First of all, I wish the Dutch Presidency of the CD all the best.

We share many of the points you raised during your statement earlier. We heard what you said about reducing the number of meetings to realign the resources at our disposal with our capacity to deliver. We certainly understand this point of view. We believe, however, that if we take this reasoning to its logical conclusion, we might end up with very few meetings at all. Our approach is based on one simple, realistic assumption: that the current international context is the least conducive to agreements, any type of agreements, not just disarmament agreements. In a world characterized by conflict, it is naive to think that we could negotiate one or more treaties in this forum any time soon.

Still, there is merit in meeting if only to keep the dialogue alive in the midst of all this uncertainty and to discuss new developments, including the debate on nuclear weapons, on the possibility of new multilateral arms control negotiations, or on the update of nuclear doctrines. Exactly because of the current high level of uncertainty, we must continue meeting and

discuss these issues here, even if we do not negotiate. And let's be frank, we are unable to negotiate now, less ready than we have been at any point for the past thirty years. But this should not stop us from having frank and interactive discussions like the ones we had last year on SBs.

On this point, I would like to thank the SB2 coordinator, Ambassador Thoni, for his dedication and commitment last year to make progress on the very thorny issue of prevention of nuclear war. We deeply regret that we were unable to replicate the 2025 template agreed upon during the Italian presidency in 2025 and re-establish the Subsidiary bodies that they could resume their work in a spirit of continuity. And we regret that we are back to a type of functioning based on formal meetings with each Presidency deciding the issues to discuss, without the very useful level of informal interaction that we had in the SBs meetings.

Mr. President,

We fully align ourselves with the statement delivered by Poland on behalf of the European Union. Let me add a few remarks in my national capacity.

In the face of the current geopolitical challenges and increasing proliferation threats, the adoption of measures targeted towards the reduction of nuclear risk becomes even more important. First of all, we reject the false dichotomy between nuclear disarmament and nuclear risk reduction. In fact, the two go hand in hand. Far from being a substitute for nuclear disarmament, risk reduction is a necessary tool not only to prevent nuclear war but also to build trust and foster a climate conducive to arms control and disarmament negotiations.

If we enhance the instruments of risk reduction, we will have moved a step closer to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons as envisaged in article VI of the NPT. Let me add that risk reduction is based on predictability, transparency and trust among relevant actors. Any behaviour that increases unpredictability while decreasing trust and transparency automatically increases risk.

In fact, we believe that risk reduction is an area where it should be easier to reach a shared understanding both in bilateral as well as multilateral contexts, together with progress on transparency and accountability.

While we believe that also non-nuclear weapon States should contribute to risk reduction initiatives, it is clear that the main responsibility lies with nuclear weapon States. Italy stresses the need for nuclear weapon states to maintain and enhance effective, as well as technically safe and secure, channels of communication and to adopt a series of measures addressing and reducing the range of risks that could lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

We encourage the P5 to intensify discussions on all possible measures to promote risk reduction as well as confidence building and transparency. Besides general political and diplomatic measures that could reduce the level of international tension, there are a number of concrete measures that nuclear-weapons states can pursue to reduce the risk of miscalculations, misunderstandings, and misperceptions that could lead to a nuclear conflict. Among them I would like to mention increasing predictability through enhanced transparency and clearer nuclear doctrines; strengthening nuclear restraint through a lower operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems (de-alerting); reducing the number and types of targets (de-targeting); resuming risk-reduction dialogues and information-sharing initiatives.

The role of AI and its responsible application in the nuclear domain is worthy of growing attention from the international community. We should further consider if and how AI can contribute to improve strategic risk reduction, while at the same time carefully consider whether, and in what measure, the introduction of elements of artificial intelligence into decision-making processes might increase risks of unintended escalation.

Nuclear disarmament verification can also contribute to promoting trust and transparency and therefore to reduce risk. Risk can also be reduced by preserving and enhancing the multilateral architecture of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. This implies strict adherence to existing instruments such as the NPT but it also implies commitment to other instruments not yet in force such as the CTBT. Full respect of the

moratoriums on nuclear tests and on production of fissile material is another crucial aspect.

And then, the beginning of negotiations on an FMCT – which remains Italy's top priority for this body – would also in and by itself reduce risk. 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.

A combination of all these measures could significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war.

But these measures require sustained political will and global cooperation, unfortunately a scarce commodity these days. In the run-up to the next NPT Review Conference, we call upon the P5 to renew their declaration on January 3rd, 2022, according to which a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. This would be very important in the current context.

As far as Italy is concerned, we remain fully committed to effective multilateral action and are ready to support all efforts that could contribute to reach these objectives.

I thank you, Mr. President