



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

Geneva, 24 March 2026

Mr President,

I would like to thank you for organising this debate on the review of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament. I would also like to thank the Secretariat for the background note, which we find very useful for our reflections.

When discussing CD membership, the first question we should ask ourselves is: does the current composition of the CD reflect today's international context? Twenty-seven years have passed since the last limited expansion which added five new members. Thirty years have elapsed since the first and main enlargement, with 23 new members. Incidentally, it is also some thirty years since the last agreement was negotiated in this body.

As Annex 2 reminds us, while 28 States were added to the initial membership, there are just as many applications pending – 28 – and some of them have been pending since 1993. In the meantime, the world has drastically changed. But the CD has not changed at all. It has not adapted. So,

the answer to the first question is: no, the CD does not reflect the current international context.

Other unwelcome developments within the CD have taken place over the past three years. Now, at every session, many countries are prevented from participating even simply as observers. This means that the possibility for them to become fully fledged members is more remote now than it has ever been.

The second question we should ask ourselves is: is limited membership still the appropriate format? As we pointed out three years ago during the retreat on the revitalization of the CD, with roughly one third of UN member States, or roughly half the UN member States if all pending applications were approved, the CD is no longer small enough to be effective, nor is it large enough to be representative. There are disarmament issues in which every country, and not just those present on the CD, has a stake.

Universality is one of the main goals for each multilateral disarmament treaty – the NPT, the BWC, the CTBT just to name a few – and we actively promote it, yet the CD remains some sort of an exclusive club. How does this square with the principle of inclusivity and ownership that is defended by many countries? We noticed with interest in the background note that in 2001 the then Special Coordinator presented three options. One of them was “qualified universality”, a concept that would, and I quote, “involve an open-ended right to membership by all member States of the United Nations and specialized agencies”. We believe this was an interesting proposal that is worth considering further.

Italy very much believes in an inclusive and participatory approach to multilateralism. It is in this vein that we should explore the idea of qualified universality. It is also in this vein that in the past we put forward the idea that every country that 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 from observing the works of the CD? Also, many of those countries pay their share of the UN budget that goes towards this Conference, but they cannot have their voice heard here. This goes against the principle of no taxation without representation.

Mr President,

The question of membership is intrinsically linked to the very nature and purpose of this body, so it is difficult to treat it separately from other aspects concerning it. Three years ago, when discussing the revitalization of the CD and, more broadly, of the disarmament machinery, we proposed making better use of the UN Disarmament Commission by integrating it with the CD. This could happen by holding alternate sessions of the UNDC in Geneva, for instance every other year, and harmonizing their respective agendas and program of work. Another possibility that we mentioned was to move the UNDC to Geneva and streamlining the calendar of the CD so as to avoid repetitions and duplications of pretty much the same debates. We also heard proposals that went farther than this, namely the merger of these two bodies.

I have heard the reference that Spain made to instruments negotiated and approved in open-ended formats, outside of this Conference. While we have supported and actively participated in those processes, negotiating disarmament agreements outside of the CD risks hollowing out the CD's role and function within the overall disarmament machinery. And we have to be aware of this. We believe that there is still merit in having a single negotiating body, although this body has not negotiated in thirty years.

Be it as it may, we should remain aware that expanding the membership does not in itself guarantee that the CD goes back to its original, negotiating mandate. Expanding the CD membership would not in itself solve the CD's problems. The main problem, we believe, is not an unrepresentative CD. The

main problem is the abuse of the rule of consensus. This is what prevents this body from delivering. But it is also true that the more members, the stronger their voice on specific issues. Let me give you an example. The beginning of negotiations on an FMCT remains a priority for the vast majority of UN member states. If all these countries, and not just CD members, could make their voice heard in the CD on this issue, the pressure to achieve a breakthrough would certainly grow. This is why we think that inclusiveness could help us find a way out of the current impasse and would at a minimum go a long way towards a more credible and accountable multilateral disarmament machinery.

I thank you, Mr. President.