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Disarmament Commission

Swiss Statement

presented by
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to the United Nations

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Mr Chairman,

I would like to start by joining with previous delegations in congratulating you on your election to the chair of the 2012 session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC). I would also like to assure you of the full support of the Swiss delegation in your task.

UNDC is commencing a new three-year cycle at a time when the UN disarmament machinery is raising serious concerns.

As challenges to international security and disarmament are growing, the institutions that make up this machinery seem to be increasingly unable to meet the expectations vested in them. These failures have significant consequences that are already being felt. If no solutions are found, their impact can only intensify in the future.

Several underlying reasons contribute to the deadlock that has blocked the disarmament machinery for a number of years now. A significant factor is that the political will to make progress is often lacking, and where it does exist, it is often not effectively capitalized upon. But the lack of progress is just as much due to causes that are institutional in nature. The disarmament forums no longer appear capable of providing answers to the challenges they face because many of the nations involved give precedence to questions of national security, to the detriment of global considerations. However, efforts to promote disarmament play an important role in strengthening human security, the protection of human rights, and economic development.

Restrictive approaches are no longer appropriate, because in today's world, national interests and security in a global sense can no longer be separated. In this situation, we feel it is becoming increasingly difficult to deny the need for an in-depth review of the whole disarmament machinery, or of a new approach in this area. Today, action has become a necessity.

Mr Chairman,

The function of the UNDC, as a specialised forum for deliberations within the United Nations' disarmament apparatus, is to develop disarmament norms by submitting concrete recommendations to the General Assembly. The recommendations put forward in the past demonstrate the added value of the Commission. However, for over twelve years now, this body has not been able to adopt such recommendations of substance. The added value that the Commission brings to the process of disarmament and arms control today is questionable.

In light of this situation, we consider it imperative for UNDC to focus its attention as of this year on the way it conducts its operations. In other words, it should include this question as an agenda item. At its last session, the General Assembly called on member states to explore and consider, in the appropriate forums, options and elements for a revitalisation of the UN's disarmament apparatus, this within the framework of the resolution entitled *revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations*. In our opinion, the UNDC fully meets this qualification of appropriate forum.

In the context of such an exercise, UNDC should look in-depth at a whole series of questions.

In particular, it should examine the issue of its own agenda. The stalemate UNDC is facing is in part related to the fact that two themes appear on its agenda, one on nuclear disarmament and the other on conventional disarmament. This creates a very unpropitious situation for progress because any impasse in one of these areas impedes the other. Thus, the option of adopting a single annual theme on the Commission's agenda warrants consideration.

In addition, it would be helpful to determine whether it would be more appropriate to have the agenda focus on specific, circumscribed themes rather than on generic issues such as nuclear disarmament or conventional disarmament. On this subject, we feel it would be opportune for the UNDC to focus its action within the field of nuclear disarmament on negative security assurances, nuclear weapons free zones, or on non-strategic nuclear weapons. Regarding conventional weapons, the UNDC could concentrate on the issue of the verification mechanisms or of confidence-building measures on the regional level.

UNDC should also examine the possibility of opening up its proceedings to exchanges with representatives from the academic world and civil society. Greater interaction with these actors could give new impetus to the work of this organ and enable it to take into account all the concerns related to disarmament issues.

Another item that warrants further attention from the UNDC concerns the submission of a report to the General Assembly that reflects the exchanges of a substantive nature. The stalemate of recent years has rendered this transmission of information impossible. The possibility should be envisaged for the Commission's incumbent Chairperson to submit, in his or her own name, a report to the General Assembly that reflects the discussions and the different opinions expressed.

Of course, the various matters that I have just enumerated do not constitute an exhaustive list of the themes that warrant further attention from the UNDC in the context of an examination of its working procedures. Other themes will also need to be looked at.

Mr Chairman,

If it is clear that the UNDC should review its own working methods, we are also convinced that it should address the issue of the United Nations' disarmament machinery in its entirety. The Commission is actually a most appropriate body for this task, because it draws together all the Member States of the United Nations.

Therefore, UNDC should not only examine its own case, but also that of other bodies. The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is the cornerstone of the disarmament machinery. To this day, it is still the single permanent multilateral forum for negotiation in the field of disarmament. For this reason, it is an essential instrument for the whole community of States, whether or not they are members of this organ. Its incapacity for over fifteen years now to undertake any substantial work is therefore a source of concern for all the Member States of the UN.

In the context of this global exercise, UNDC could also examine the respective roles of the various organs of the disarmament machinery, their interaction and the way it could possibly be improved. Finally, in the framework of this approach, UNDC could also examine the processes that would be required to carry out a reform of the existing machinery and ways of creating the conditions that would make this exercise possible.

Mr Chairman,

We applaud the fact that initiatives have begun to emerge that aim, at long last, to tackle the stalemate that blocks the disarmament machinery. In light of the present situation, a multi-tiered process represents the best way of moving forward.

The high-level meeting of 24 September 2010 convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations represented the first milestone, followed by a debate in the plenary session of the General Assembly in July 2011. The issue was also raised in the context of the 1st Commission during the 65th and 66th sessions of the General Assembly. As I have already mentioned, the 66th session of General Assembly has called in a resolution to explore various options for a reform of the disarmament apparatus.

The next step will be to assess the implementation of this resolution during the next session of the General Assembly. This evaluation will of course take into account the proceedings and the results of the 2012 session of UNDC. This assessment will serve as the foundation for the General Assembly to make the decisions that are called for.

For this reason, the 2012 session of UNDC is invested with a particular significance. It has an important role to play in providing a response to the paralysis of the UN's disarmament machinery. We can only encourage it to fully assume its responsibilities.

Mr Chairman,

Thank you for your attention.