STATEMENT
BY
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ON
THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE 24 SEPTEMBER 2010
HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON "REVITALISING THE WORK
OF THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT AND
TAKING FORWARD MULTILATERAL
DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS"

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Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes the opportunity presented by the High-level Meeting convened on 24 September 2010 at the initiative of the Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon to reflect on the challenges facing the multilateral disarmament machinery, particularly the Conference on Disarmament (CD), and for the Secretary-General’s continued support for the efforts of Members States to advance the multilateral disarmament agenda and to take forward multilateral disarmament negotiations.

My delegation believes that the statements made by Ministers and other high-ranking officials illustrated the resolve of the overwhelming majority of States to make concrete progress towards the achievement of a world free from the threat posed by nuclear weapons through the early commencement of disarmament negotiations.

Chairperson,

The adoption of a Programme of Work during the 2009 Session of the Conference on Disarmament signalled to the international community the hope for progress after many years of stalemate in this body and an era of resort to unilateral and other limited initiatives that have not always optimally served our collective security interests. We recall the positive atmosphere and spirit of compromise that allowed the adoption of that Programme of Work, which covered all the core issues on the CD’s agenda. It is indeed regrettable that the CD could not implement that decision and that no further progress could subsequently be achieved. The current situation in the CD is particularly disappointing given the positive pronouncements made in recent years.

South Africa remains deeply committed to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, based on our conviction that nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are inextricably linked and that urgent, transparent, irreversible and verifiable measures on both fronts are required. While we are satisfied with the progress that has already been achieved in strengthening measures aimed at preventing the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, we are deeply concerned about the continuing lack of progress on nuclear disarmament, particularly in the context of the mandate of the CD.

The CD has the responsibility to conduct multilateral disarmament negotiations as mandated by the First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978. Due to its inability to fulfil this basic mandate during the last 14 years, some have understandably started questioning whether the CD remains the appropriate vehicle to pursue disarmament objectives. Others argue that it is the only institution that can deliver results. Some believe that the CD is out of step with the external reality, while others argue that it is a mere reflection of that reality. Some say that there is something wrong with its institutional arrangements, including its Rules of Procedure, while others believe that they provide the necessary guarantees required by States to protect their security interests. Despite the wide-ranging views on these questions, the central issue that we as Member States have to address is whether the CD is still able to fulfill its mandate as a multilateral disarmament negotiation forum, or whether it is a creation of a bygone era focused on maintaining the status quo that is out of step with today’s reality and in need of reform.

Chairperson,

The past achievements of the CD speak for themselves. Core disarmament instruments have been negotiated in this forum and no one can therefore claim that the structure of the
CD does not allow negotiations to take place. Neither can it be argued that something is wrong with the secretarial or financial support for the work of the Conference, nor can the case be made that its agenda does not allow negotiations to take place.

What is clear, Chairperson, is that the CD can no longer continue with business as usual. South Africa has consistently argued that our collective security concerns require sustainable collective solutions that take into account not only the individual security needs of those that continue to hold the power in an unequal international system, but that would reflect our shared security interests. While acknowledging its imperfections and the need for reform, we remain fully committed to the strengthening of the multilateral disarmament machinery.

Chairperson,

The High-level Meeting served as an important catalyst for a critical reflection on approaches that have been taken in recent years that have prevented progress in the multilateral disarmament arena. South Africa does not believe that a revision of the CD’s Rules of Procedure, including the consensus rule, is really needed. What is necessary is a critical reflection on the approach that has been taken towards the conduct of negotiations within the Conference. We will therefore join those delegations that wish to seize this opportunity to provide renewed impetus towards progress in the disarmament arena that will contribute towards increased security for all.

Disarmament is not only the business of those with the military might or those represented in the CD. It is the business of all those who seek a better and more secure world – governments, members of civil society and ordinary citizens - which therefore places a special responsibility on those represented in the Conference.

Chairperson,

Given the Rules under which the CD operates and the broad scope of issues covered by its Agenda, we believe that adequate guarantees exist to safeguard the security interests of all members of the CD, while allowing us to address our collective security concerns. These issues are long overdue and the CD cannot continue with business as usual. What is at stake is not the continued relevance of the Conference on Disarmament as a multilateral disarmament negotiating forum, but our collective security interests in an increasingly inter-connected and inter-dependent world.

In conclusion, Chairperson, my delegation stands ready to work with you and all Member States, Members of the CD and civil society with a view to supporting substantive progress on these long outstanding matters.

I thank you.