General Assembly
First Committee
01 November 2012

Thematic Debate on the Disarmament Machinery

Statement by Norway

Mr. Chair,

The fundamental purpose of the intergovernmental disarmament machinery is to enable the international community to deliberate and subsequently negotiate, with the view to create instruments that enhance our common security and remove weapons that cause unacceptable harm.

The outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference reflects a broad desire to achieve tangible results on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The desire is reflected also in a much broader and more engaged public debate on disarmament issues than we had only a few years ago. In our statement during the nuclear segment, we joined the many expressions of appreciation for the recent efforts made by the five NWS, and not least the implementation of the new START agreement. It is all the more striking that neither the CD nor the UNDC have so far been able to capitalize on these positive developments, nor to move towards fulfilling the clear goals set by last NPT Review Conference.

(Check against delivery)
Norway has over the last decade strongly supported any initiative to bring the Conference on Disarmament out of its impasse, including by expanding it to include all interested states. Any credible and relevant multilateral disarmament negotiating body should, as a matter of principle, be open to all countries, and especially parties to the NPT. In addition, the Conference should enhance its interaction with civil society, to benefit from the views of all relevant stakeholders.

The UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC), established for the purpose of conducting substantive deliberations and making recommendations, has not been able to deliver anything since 1999. To be of use, the UNDC simply has to be made more practical, more focused and more relevant. At its last session in April this year, Norway joined a number of member states seeking to improve the working methods of the Commission, but once again practical steps did not command the full consensus which its rules of procedure demand.

It has been argued that there is nothing wrong with the current intergovernmental machinery, and that the underlying problem is the lack of political will. We disagree. There is in fact quite a lot of political will, as demonstrated for example during the many statements we have just heard in this committee. But after waiting for more than a decade, and in spite of considerable resources spent and repeated efforts made, in Geneva and New York, we still see no movement.

With a CD locked in almost permanent standstill, and a UNDC which only agrees on its agenda and procedural report, we must realize that we have an obligation to think harder on how to put all this political goodwill to good use, so that we can actually move forward. The proposal put forward by Austria, Mexico and Norway of convening meetings in an Open ended Working Group next year should be seen in this light. The purpose is simply to create a venue for free and transparent discussions on how to achieve our common objective on reaching and sustaining our common goal of a world without nuclear weapons - and to report back to next year's session of the UN General Assembly, reflecting all views and proposals presented. We do need some new ideas and some fresh air, to fulfill the promises of the NPT 2010 Review Conference, and to see if we can make our multilateral bodies work again.
Finally, a few words on the First Committee itself. We would continue to advocate reforms in the working methods of the Committee. Norway appreciates the proposals by High Representative Kane to further streamline the reporting procedure of adopted resolutions. In addition, we continue to believe that we should sharply reduce the number of resolutions that simply repeat the text of last year. If a resolution is adopted, it stands until otherwise decided. If we could agree on this, we would have a lot more time for more useful, interesting and productive pursuits.

This year’s session has been interesting. We have seen a large number of members states engage in the thematic discussions, not least in relation to the ATT. It is also encouraging that the 67th session of the First Committee actually seeks to do something about the sad state of affairs in the established intergovernmental machinery and not only talk about it, with the resolution on the Open ended working group that I just mentioned being one example. It all demonstrates that our Committee can play a constructive role in moving multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control forward.

Thank you!