Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, the Bureau and the High Representative, Ms. Angela Kane, for inviting me in my function as President of the Conference on Disarmament to take part in this panel discussion to speak on the work of the Conference on Disarmament, to introduce its report, and, more broadly, to share a few thoughts with the members of the First Committee on the overall situation of the CD.

Germany has assumed the CD Presidency in August 2012, following Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland and France. Together we were what is known as the “P6” and I would like to use the opportunity to express my gratitude to all of my colleagues for the excellent cooperation we had as P6.

As the last of the 6 Presidents it was my primary duty to see to it that the annual report of the CD was adopted by consensus as the CD’s Rules of Procedure require it and also to lead the informal consultations on the draft resolution on the CD report.

Mr. Chairman,

A few days ago we have heard very pertinent remarks by the distinguished Secretary General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, on the situation of the CD. I would urge delegations to study his observations very carefully.

In my opening statement as President I said in the Conference on 21 August that in view of the past achievements of the Conference I regarded it as an honour to assume the office of President, but I added that I would feel even more honoured if the CD made active use of the potential it undoubtedly has, that is where it fulfilled its own mandate, which is to negotiate new legal instruments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

This sentence captures what the problem is: The Conference on Disarmament could indeed play a most useful role, but, alas, it has not been in a position to do so in well over a decade.

I do not know anybody in our field, who does not share a sense of frustration and disappointment at this situation. In fact the sentiment of frustration has been expressed in
nearly every statement in the CD, including by the President of the UNGA and the UNSG and visiting dignitaries, just as it has been expressed by so many delegations in the course of this First Committee.

This does not exclude differences in - let us say - temperament: While many regard the situation of impasse in the CD as entirely unacceptable - some even start to call into question the further raison d'être of this forum, if the deadlock continues - , others advise to remain patient and wait for more conducive overall circumstances.

It is this overall situation which continues to provide the background of our work in the CD.

Mr. Chairman,

The first duty of the members of the CD continues to be to seek to agree and implement a programme of work, because without it the CD simply cannot start its actual substantive work of negotiating new instruments.

In this year 2012 - like in the previous two years – all endeavors by Member States and successive Presidents in this regard were inspired by the programme of work which was indeed adopted by consensus in May 2009 under the effective Presidency of Algeria at the time, contained in the often referred to document CD/1864. Unfortunately, as it turned out subsequently, this programme of work could not be implemented.

In the following years of 2010 and 2011 various ideas and concepts were discussed only informally to overcome the situation of protracted stalemate, but to no avail: Successive Presidents regularly came back with the bad news that they could not see any consensus emerging, often leaving Member States guessing who had exactly which problem.

Now, the year 2012 was different in this regard, because this year the Presidency of Egypt made another determined attempt at getting a programme of work agreed and the President went all the way in the sense that he did indeed submit a draft programme of work for adoption, the draft decision contained in CD/1933/Rev 1 of 14 March. However, an objection was raised, as a result of which the Conference once again did not succeed in reaching consensus and thus did not succeed in commencing substantive work.

Given this unfortunate situation the Presidency of Ethiopia presented a Schedule of Activities developed in cooperation with the other five Presidents of the 2012 session, which foresaw discussions on all agenda items and which also provided an opportunity for discussion on the “revitalization of the CD”.

Contrary to previous years, when similar “discussions” were held according to a rather dense schedule, the 2012 Schedule of Activities foresaw only one plenary meeting per week, which, it would appear, delegations regarded as entirely sufficient in view of the fact that “thematic discussions” of this nature had been held many times in the more distant and recent past already.

Mr. Chairman,

This was the overall situation in which the report of the CD for the UN General Assembly
came up for negotiation this August. I am pleased to report that after rather intensive and lengthy discussions the CD adopted a report by consensus which in my judgement describes the reality of the situation of the CD more accurately than before.

While it quite rightly continues to refer to the messages of of dignitaries celebrating the accomplishments of the CD, it refers at the same time to expressions of concern that the Conference was no longer living up to the world’s expectations of it to advance disarmament goals. In this connection the report refers very clearly to the calls to overcome its ongoing situation of impasse for over a decade.

The report also states that the President submitted for adoption a draft Decision on a programme of work contained in CD/1933/Rev.1. It also refers to other relevant proposals and suggestions and it states that despite these efforts the Conference did not succeed in reaching consensus.

Mr. Chairman,

There exist different views among CD Member States as to why it is that the CD has not been able for so long to start to do its actual work, the most basic contradiction being between those who believe that a “lack of political will” is the fundamental issue, while others see the problem in the Rules of Procedure of the CD, most notably in the rule of consensus or at least in the very strict way the rule of consensus is applied in the CD.

Personally, I have to say, I find this juxtaposition somewhat sterile, because both statements strike me as true in a certain sense: if the “political will” always existed the international community would have solved all the problems in the world a long time ago, and of course it is also difficult to deny that it is much harder to get anything done when everybody around the table can block even to start to work on a given problem.

Mr. Chairman,

What the next session of the CD will bring, that is to say whether the CD will finally adopt and implement a programme of work in 2013, I cannot know, of course, because I am not a prophet.

But in light of the experience of the couple of years that I have been involved in the CD’s work I am afraid I have to say that it is rather difficult at this point in time to be optimistic.

However, with a view to the important tasks waiting to be tackled in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation I still hope that states will look at the CD also in the spirit of a famous quote, which I would allow myself to paraphrase for our purposes: “Do not ask what the CD can do for your country, ask what your country can do for the CD”, because ultimately we all have a shared responsibility to see to it that our institutions work so they can actually deliver.

I thank you Mr. Chairman