67th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIRST COMMITTEE

THEMATIC DEBATE: DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

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TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

As prepared for the record
Mr Chairman,

New Zealand joins others to give voice to our enormous sense of frustration and disappointment at the ongoing dysfunction in the UN’s disarmament machinery.

How can any committee or multilateral body be allowed to continue on for so many years with no productive outcome whatsoever – let alone one that lives up to its important mandate? The CD – and indeed other elements of the UN’s disarmament machinery – was intended to facilitate progress on important issues and, indeed, a fully-functional standing body carrying out multilateral disarmament negotiations would be a tremendous asset to the international community.

Instead we have a situation whereby the mechanisms that should facilitate progress in the CD are in fact hindering it. As a body, it can hardly be allowed to be simply an end in itself. Can it really be allowed to live off some historic successes of long ago in order to justify its continued existence?

It is little wonder, Mr Chairman, that, in the face of this now long-standing impasse, a range of initiatives have emerged at this year’s First Committee which aim to take forward the issues on the CD’s agenda. If there is no resolution in sight of the problems within the UN’s disarmament machinery - as would seem to be the case - the UN General Assembly has a responsibility to take up these issues. Issues, such as nuclear disarmament, are too important to be left languishing in a dysfunctional body.

New Zealand will support all resolutions put forward this year in this Committee aimed at advancing the effectiveness of the UN’s disarmament machinery and disarmament outcomes. We have co-sponsored the resolution put forward by Austria, Mexico and Norway with several other countries which would establish an Open-ended Working group to discuss the very important issue of nuclear disarmament. This is too important a topic to be allowed entirely to be shelved while the CD discusses its procedural issues.

We will support the resolution put forward by Indonesia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement which calls for a High-level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament. And we will also support the resolution put forward by Canada which calls for a Group of Governmental Experts in regard to a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Equally, by the same token, we do not support any initiative – however well intended - which risks further imperilling the disarmament machinery. New Zealand recognises the important role played by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in promoting greater understanding amongst States and civil society alike on issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation. It is part of the important bequest to us all from UNSSOD1. Many would say it is one of the better functioning outcomes of that Conference.
I understand that UNIDIR is part of a set of reforms being proffered to consolidate knowledge management within the UN, and to assist the learning and training of United Nations staff. These are collectively being referred to as cluster 7 proposals.

But, Mr Chairman, UNIDIR’s focus is not on UN staff. Its focus and mandate relates to Member States. We are surprised, therefore, to learn about proposals to restructure and reform an Institute which is focussed on Member States' needs, and which is part of our Membership’s disarmament machinery but which does not seem to have been discussed substantively with Member States nor explained comprehensively to them.

Accordingly, my Delegation would welcome clarity regarding whether or not UNIDIR will be able to continue doing what it does at present for UN Member States if it is restructured according to the proposals we have learnt about in recent weeks. Certainly any outcome that might result in a lesser role and function for UNIDIR in supporting the needs of Member States would be of deep concern to New Zealand.

Mr Chairman, New Zealand continues to value the important role of civil society in advancing our disarmament and arms control interests. We welcome our ongoing close cooperation with civil society across the disarmament and non-proliferation field and will continue to work for their greater inclusion in our work.

One of the important roles that civil society has is in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation education; in raising awareness amongst our populations about the importance of the issues that are – or perhaps should be - on the international agenda.

New Zealand is a strong supporter of disarmament and non-proliferation education efforts. This is a vital activity for the promotion and achievement of sustainable peace, disarmament and non-proliferation. At this 10th anniversary of the UN Secretary General’s report on disarmament and non-proliferation education, we urge all States to embrace efforts to promote greater understanding of the vast number of important challenges on the international security agenda and the need for these to be tackled head on.