Statement by

H.E., Ambassador Uffe A. Balslev

Undersecretary for Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

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Intervention by H.E., Ambassador Uffe A. Balslev,
Undersecretary for Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Control

Thank you, Mr Chairman,

Let me start by congratulating you and the other members of the bureau upon your election and assure you of Denmark’s full co-operation and support.

Denmark aligns itself fully with the statement made by the European Union.

While the multilateral disarmament machinery normally grinds slowly with few dramatic events that would warrant the attention of the world press, this year has been different. We have seen extraordinary achievements like the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty in the General Assembly on April 2nd and now with 113 signatures; or the outstanding, fast-paced diplomacy that led to the OPCW Executive Council Decision of 27 September and the subsequent UN Security Council Resolution 2118 with the aim of enforcing the disarmament of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal.
We have also, however, been faced with some of the most blatant examples of non-compliance with long-standing obligations and, even worse, atrocious war crimes committed with weapons we thought we had already confined to the dustbin of history.

First and foremost we have been reminded that drafting and adopting legal texts and resolutions is only work half-done. We have to focus equally on implementation and compliance. The United Nations system is challenged in this regard and will continue to be so in the years ahead. That will be a Danish focus.

Allow me to dwell on three issues of particular concern to Denmark: The continued stalemate in the multilateral nuclear disarmament talks; proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruction; and regulating conventional arms trade.

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Firstly, Mr Chairman, Denmark shares the goal of a world totally free of nuclear weapons. We believe we can get there by a gradual, "building block" approach where we from many angles, and through an inclusive process, agree to steadily chip off from these weapons’ role, importance and legitimacy until in the end there will be no space left for them at all. One such new building block that we would welcome would be for the US and Russia to start looking at reciprocal cuts in non-strategic nuclear weapons as suggested by President Obama in his Berlin Speech. But we also need a comprehensive and dynamic framework for multilateral disarmament negotiations with full and active participation of all nuclear weapon states as well as non-nuclear weapon states.
Regrettably, the Conference on Disarmament is not delivering and hence, after more than a decade of frustration, we agreed last year on three important measures to try to create new momentum: The Open-ended Working Group that met in Geneva in May to August, The High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament in the General Assembly two weeks ago and, for the coming year, the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts to look at a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

While we fully throw our support behind the latter group, we think we can already now conclude that particularly the Open-ended Working Group under the able chairmanship of Ambassador Manuel Dengo has been a success. Not in reaching agreement but in conceptualizing new approaches and better defining differences that should be bridged. We thank those who participated constructively.

As before, Denmark will join a statement presented by New Zealand expressing deep concern over the devastating immediate and long-term humanitarian effects that could follow from the use of nuclear weapons. We are happy to see the group of countries behind it grow ever bigger. In our view this third-track approach is complementary to existing multilateral or bilateral disarmament and non-proliferation mechanisms and is not meant to undermine them. Nor is it meant to reinterpret international humanitarian law. Our ambition is through a fact-based discussion to increase awareness and thus add further impetus to our work.

Equally important is the work of implementing all aspects of the forward-looking work programme agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, not least the convening of a conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of
nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. We commend the
tireless work of Ambassador Jaakko Laajava and call on all the countries of the
region to work towards a successful conference in an open and constructive
manner without preconditions.

Secondly, Mr Chairman, we must address the real proliferation threats to our
collective security. From the DPRK, from Iran, from Syria and from elsewhere,
including non-state actors. For this the UN Security Council holds a key
responsibility. Denmark continues to fully support Security Council Resolutions
1540 and 1887. And we insist that all countries, not least the DPRK, Iran and
Syria, comply fully with all resolutions of the Security Council, the IAEA Board of
Governors and other obligations under the NPT. We stand squarely behind
the laudable efforts led by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton in the E3+3
context to seek a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. We are
encouraged by the more conducive atmosphere, we experienced during the high-
level segment but we need deeds, not words to bring us forward.

We have been witnesses to a particularly disturbing development in Syria with the
use of chemical weapons. It casts a dark shadow on this Committee’s work. The
use of chemical weapons against the civilian population was overwhelmingly
confirmed by the Sellström report. It was not part of the UN inspectors’ mandate
to place the blame for the atrocity of 21st August but the sheer amount of proof
that exists in addition to the report points to the likely perpetrators. Use of
chemical weapons is a war crime and there should be no impunity.
The legally binding and enforceable UN Security Council resolution condemns the attacks, calls for accountability for this crime and envisages a forceful international reaction in the event of non-compliance with the OPCW decision as the Council will impose measures under chapter VII of the UN Charter. We are encouraged by preliminary reports from the UN and OPCW of cooperation from the regime and the Syrian opposition in implementation of the OPCW decision and Security Council resolutions.

Denmark has contributed financially to the most difficult and complicated task of removing and destroying Syria’s chemical weapons and we are looking into further ways of contributing including with expertise, know-how and personnel as appropriate.

While occupied with the most serious chemical weapons challenge to peace and security for decades, we must not forget that biological agents and toxins used as weapons potentially pose a comparable or perhaps even greater risk. Denmark will continue to contribute to the common task of strengthening bio security, reducing proliferation risks and improving the toolkit at the disposal of the Secretary General.

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Finally, Mr. Chairman, to end on a happy note: The Arms Trade Treaty.

The jubilant culmination in early April of nine years of efforts and negotiations was indeed a memorable event. We commend the tremendous efforts of all involved, not least Ambassadors Moritán and Woolcott.
Now we must look forward. The Treaty must be brought into force quickly, we must work for universalization and we must stand guard around its high standards while furthering implementation.

Unregulated and irresponsible international trade in arms has had devastating effects. Properly implemented, the ATT will make a real difference for millions of people around the world. We should take steps to ensure that the costs and administrative burden of an effective implementation does not discourage least developed countries – often the most affected – from joining the Treaty.

We are encouraged that the Participating States of the Wassenaar Arrangement, whose Plenary Denmark chairs this year, have declared their readiness to share the Arrangement’s accumulated experience and expertise with other states as these start implementing the ATT.

Already at the March conference Denmark committed 1.7 million USD to support capacity building initiatives particularly in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. Denmark has committed about two thirds of this through the UN’s Trust Facility UNSCAR and half of that has already been disbursed. We encourage other Member States to donate generously to this important, life-saving effort.

Thank you, Mr Chairman