Mr. President,

I wish to congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of the CD and to assure you of the full support of the German delegation.

I am pleased to see the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Angela Kane, in our midst today and I would like to thank her for her thoughtful statement.

As you noted, Mr. President, this will be my last plenary, since I will be leaving Geneva in a few weeks’ time. I wish to thank you for the kind words you addressed to me as one of the departing Heads of Delegation.

On the occasion of my departure I would like to share some personal reflections with you and colleagues.

Mr. President,

When I delivered my initial statement in early August 2009, hopes were running high that the CD was just about to overcome its long running deadlock. A Program of Work with meaningful, substantive and very sensible taskings had just been adopted by consensus under the Presidency of Algeria, and the expectation was that the CD was back on track at long last to do what it is meant to do, that is, to work out new treaties in disarmament and non-proliferation.

I very much looked forward to that task because ever since I got interested in security policy and disarmament issues as a young student I was convinced that the existence of nuclear weapons poses a formidable danger for mankind and that every effort must be made to make progress towards a world free of the menace of these weapons. Having grown up in a country
which lived in its then two states literally along the borderline of the nuclear confrontation of

the Cold War, it appeared only natural to me to develop a keen interest in these matters, and as a student of history it was clear to me that any use of nuclear weapons has catastrophic humanitarian consequences. In his Berlin speech President Obama has summed up the challenge succinctly: “So long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe.”

In trying to grapple with the profound challenge posed by the advent of nuclear weapons I always felt that intellectual honesty would demand not making things too easy for oneself by simply denouncing states who seek or possess nuclear weapons as essentially behaving just plainly irrationally. The real challenge, I always felt, was to try to understand why states see a need to ensure their security by relying on nuclear deterrence and to develop in light of such a deeper understanding what it would take to create an environment in which states would feel secure enough to renounce the nuclear option.

My own conclusion was that determined disarmament efforts and equally determined efforts to overcome deep-seated political antagonisms and conflicts by tackling their root causes would have to go hand in hand for a nuclear weapons free world to become a reality. And I think we must not have any illusions: If we want to be successful in disarmament, effective non-proliferation must be the other side of the coin, because it is crystal clear that the readiness to only even contemplate moving towards zero will itself drop instantly to zero, if there is only a remote possibility that a case of nuclear proliferation might be on the horizon. This being evidently so, I find it difficult to understand why there is still hesitation among some Non-Nuclear Weapons States to sign up to the IAEA Additional Protocol.

Mr. President,

It is certainly true that considerable progress has been made in nuclear disarmament in terms of agreements concluded and weapons arsenals and weapons grade material reduced. This must not be underestimated.

At the same time it is fair to say that after the end of the Cold War there were widespread expectations of much more rapid progress in downsizing arsenals and reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines. One reason for this expectation was, I believe, also the insight that the absurd numerical levels nuclear arsenals had reached at the peak of the Cold War – namely altogether the absolutely staggering number of some 70,000 nuclear weapons - had devoured resources on a colossal scale, which had hugely negative effects on the economic well being of states, which in turn could literally undermine the very existence of states, as we could all observe. One can only hope that we have all learnt from that experience so that security is no longer seen rather simplistically in terms of making mechanistic comparisons between the sheer sizes of military arsenals but in a much wider framework and perspective. The observation of the UNSG, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon that “the world is overarmed and peace is underfunded” hits the nail on it’s head.

Mr. President,

2012 SIPRI data list nine states possessing a total of 19,000 nuclear weapons, out of which appr. 18,000 were held by Russia and the United States. 2000 nuclear weapons are kept in a
state of high operational alert worldwide. I believe these numbers need no further comment, particularly when one tries to answer for oneself the question what planners actually think they could or should concretely do with all these weapons in critical situations. Surprisingly high are also the figures for expenditures for the nuclear weapons complexes planned for the next decade. And what strikes me as particularly worrying is the fact that while in the Cold War region as we came to know it, the nuclear weapons competition has clearly abated in the last 25 years or so, other regions have emerged in the meantime, where either an open or an opaque nuclear weapons competition was set in motion which is accelerating in terms of a build-up of arsenals and a concomitant theorising about scenarios of limited or tactical nuclear war; one would really have hoped that such would have been relegated to history books of military strategy by now.

Mr. President,

It is against this background that one can only warmly welcome President Obama’s recent announcement to reduce the US deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third, to seek negotiated cuts with Russia to move beyond Cold War nuclear postures and to seek bold reductions in U.S. and Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Europe. As you know, the latter is a goal particularly important to Germany. We feel of course honored that President Obama would choose Berlin for such policy announcements.

One can only hope that we can move into this direction as soon as possible and that we are not taken back into Cold War thinking by letting the military once again dominate the debate with sterile comparative exercises of adding numbers of the nuclear arsenals of different actors. The 2010 NPT Action Plan clearly stipulates “to reduce and eliminate all types of nuclear weapons” and it “encourages in particular those states with the largest nuclear arsenals in this regard” (Action 2 ii.).

Responding to President Obama's announcements, the German Foreign Minster, Mr. Westerwelle, noted: “A nuclear weapons free world is a vision, but not an illusion.”

Mr. President,

Why do I make such lengthy observations when I am expected to speak about the work of the Conference on Disarmament? The answer is simple: all of this constitutes the background to our work, which, in my experience, we are in danger of losing sight of in our fixation on our daily bread of the “program of work”, the “four core issues”, the “rules of procedure” and whatever other items are under discussion in the CD.

Our task in the CD is to work out global legal regimes for disarmament and non-proliferation.

It needs to be stressed that our purview is not restricted to nuclear issues, because there are also other issues on the agenda of the CD, a fact which does not seem to be very present really. I for one continue to feel for example that it would be very worth while indeed to seek a treaty in the CD banning the weaponization of space, even if this is not a prospect which needs to worry us today or tomorrow.

Mr President,
Unfortunately, we have not managed in 18 years to work continuously on a new treaty on any of the items on our decades-old agenda.

While I understand that states have different wish lists, I fail to understand why it should be so difficult to agree to tackle a subject, which all of us who profess to seek a nuclear weapons free world should embrace as an important building bloc on the road to a nuclear weapons free world - namely banning the production of the fuel to build nuclear weapons.

Such a treaty would have at least two very significant benefits:

- It would clearly signal the determination of the international community to put an end to the quantitative nuclear arms race, and

- it would establish an international verification system, which would serve as a most valuable test run for a future verification system of a nuclear weapons free word.

I do not understand why those who want us to go directly to the goal so to speak by suggesting to negotiate a Nuclear Weapons Convention right away appear to have reservations to support this important intermediate step. While I do not see why one cannot be in favour of both projects at the same time, I certainly see the danger of betting the whole farm on a – as we all know perfectly well - very ambitious long term project and neglecting what is a concrete, practical and doable next step, which would be beneficial for disarmament and non-proliferation at the same time. And to those who argue that a treaty banning the production of fuel for nuclear weapons is problematic because it would indirectly legitimize once again the division between the haves and the have-nots, I would say this: Why should a provision describing such a treaty as a further building bloc towards a nuclear weapons free world not be achievable? Would that not exactly be the “building bloc” approach they have been advocating recently?

Mr. President,

We were very close indeed to beginning this important work. In the four years I spent in this chamber attempts to get this project going - and thus to get the entire CD going after well over a decade of deadlock - were blocked repeatedly by only one and the same member state. I am not aware of any other draft program of work presenting a fundamentally different approach which would have gotten even remotely as close to consensus, but I always wondered whether enough was actually being done to persuade the dissenting member.

Which brings me to the issue of the consensus rule, a much debated point in the CD. The impression I gained is that too many act as if consensus means that one must always insist on one’s own preferred outcome, rather than to accept in the interest of moving forward collectively what one can live with. In practice this means that the bar for any work mandate is set very high by some. But the crucial question put to us by the President is not whether we can “support” a given proposal, but only whether we object to it – there is a very significant difference between these two questions!

Furthermore it has to be said that when states single-handedly block the mere beginning of a treaty-negotiation and do so repeatedly over years, they take upon themselves a great
responsibility, because they not only prevent the international community from developing new international legal norms, but also because they set an example others can follow, which over time can make multilateralism grind to a halt. Such behaviour is all the more perplexing when all actors are protected in their vital security interests by the consensus rule – and if at the end one does not like a draft treaty coming out of such an exercise, one is not forced to become a party to it, as enough examples have shown.

But I have to say that the longer I watched what was going on the more an impression grew inside me that the name of the game is not so much to actually achieve a breakthrough, but rather to make sure that one is not seen when blocking a breakthrough.

The work methods of the CD make this quite easy, because delegations need not make their reservations known to the member states at all, but simply tell the four-weeks-President behind closed doors what they do not like. And if a President does come up with a proposal which one would actually have thought was quite sensible, one can bet that there are always some who claim to have some sophisticated theological problem with it and who talk it down, again mostly behind closed doors. No wonder the public has no clue as to what is actually going in the CD.

The often made point that it was only a “lack of political will” which prevents progress I found always somewhat empty, because it is of course the political will of those who are on the other side of an argument which is always lacking, never one’s own!

Mr. President,

Do I have the recipe after four years what the CD should do to get out of its predicament? I am afraid I have to say that I do not have the magic wand either.

However, in looking at the situation of multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts as a whole, I still believe that the international community should continue to pursue with determination an internationally verifiable and non-discriminatory treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons as an important building bloc on the road to a nuclear weapons free world. I do not see why this should not be achievable, provided determined and genuine efforts are made by all. Whether making references to time-honoured documents is of real help in this endeavour or rather only helps to disguise the real reasons for the stalemate, has been a question going more and more through my mind. Everybody knows that proper verification of such a treaty will require transparency of all relevant nuclear materials, which are of course nothing else than the result of “past production”. If that is true, why cannot we then, e.g., agree that the negotiations will deal with all questions relevant for the achievement of the purpose of the treaty? I believe if we are all really serious about wanting to achieve such a treaty, no one should have a problem to meet on the basis of a commitment along such or similar lines.

Mr. President,

As things stand one has to be doubtful whether the CD will arrive at a substantive mandate any time soon, which can only be a mandate to work on a treaty and not just to discuss our agenda items. The glimmer of hope I still have is that the sheer existence of the UNGA Open
Ended Working Group will help make people realize that some real substantive flexibility is definitely required now if the CD as an institution is not to be seriously damaged.

In any event the time may have come for the CD to make yet another effort in taking a serious look at the entire range of its work methods, including the questions of expansion and the contribution civil society could and indeed should make. The Secretary-General of the CD, Mr. Tokayev, has made very thoughtful observations and practical suggestions in this regard in plenary recently. I pick out only one element, which is the creation of a working group to produce a program of work. It is indeed high time that member states start to negotiate the program of work among themselves directly, also because this would create a much greater degree of transparency, which would be a desirable goal in itself. The fact that no one seems to have bothered to do that so far is very curious indeed.

Mr. President,

One nearly always leaves with mixed feelings. The standstill in the CD has certainly created a sense of frustration in me, because it is no fun to have to invest energy into something the realization of which runs into – at least on the face of it - hard to understand objections by some all the time. I often thought of the joke in which a traveller, who is completely lost in the middle of nowhere, asks a farmer: “What is the way to Geneva?”, whereupon the farmer responds after quite a while of reflection: “Sir, you can’t get there from here!”

But I have to say that this frustration did not prevent me from enjoying my time in Geneva greatly. I am delighted that I could make a contribution, also as a President of the CD, trying to create a more realistic picture of the actual situation of this body. And of course, there were many other things to do which kept one busy all the time.

A key reason why I enjoyed my time greatly was the collegial and friendly relations among colleagues, nearly always irrespective of whether one was in agreement or not. As someone who always enjoys engaging in debate and who likes to challenge received wisdom and self-serving political correctness – and I have always known very well that not everybody finds that so good - I really appreciated this positive spirit. I want to thank everybody for that.

A special word of thanks to all those who help us do our work, the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and the staff in the Secretariat, UNIDIR, the interpreters, the Geneva Forum and the writers of Reaching Critical Will and News&Media.

Finally, my thanks to my own team, who have supported and endured me over the years with great dedication.

Mr. President, Dear Colleagues,

I bid you farewell and wish you good luck in your endeavours.

Thank you.