



STATEMENT

By

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Farewell Statement in the CD

Like most colleagues who have a distant recollection of a time when the CD was an important, working institution, I assumed when I arrived here in 2001 that getting the Conference back to work was simply a matter of trying harder. Three years on, I know better. But it is, I think, a forgivable error, because what is needed to get the CD back to work does seem pretty obvious. Why then does it not happen? I think it is because, as my previous Canadian colleague once said, we go on spinning the wheels in the same rut.

In consequence there are those who argue for shutting the CD down. They think that the main work of arms control has now been accomplished, and that with the important gains we have made since the end of the Cold War there is now little left to do. I beg to disagree. The CD is an effective barometer of the international situation, and it is at a low point because that is now deeply clouded. The barriers to progress are summed up in two statements I heard recently. In one, a delegate described the first, second and third priorities of his government as being "nuclear disarmament". In another, a delegate said that nuclear disarmament was yesterday's issue. The priority was counter-proliferation and counter-terrorism.

How are we to reconcile these two very different opinions on the state of international security? The difference does, of course, underline the fact that perceptions of security are highly subjective. One country's security may be another country's threat. Personally I think there may be more to the problem of international security than is dreamt of in either philosophy.

Our common objective is a world in which international peace and security can be maintained at much lower levels of armament, and consequently at lower levels of risk and cost. In the United States, Russia, the UK and France, doctrines based on the presumption of nuclear use have declined and so have the numbers of deployed weapons. Elsewhere we are still a long way from achieving the same trend, and each new nuclear weapon state that emerges takes us one more step away from it. In that sense, it must be obvious that preventing further proliferation is the highest priority.

So the greatest contribution the non-nuclear weapon states can make to nuclear disarmament is to continue to renounce nuclear weapons and to make sure their partners do the same. Since relying on good intentions will not be enough: we need to go on building the highest barriers we can to the transfer of nuclear weapons know-how and technology. The greatest contribution the existing nuclear weapon states can make is to refrain from testing, manufacturing fissile material and go on reducing their arsenals, where they have not done so already, to the minimum level.

But that is not the end of the story. I am well aware that the pressure for progress towards the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament will not go away. It remains a very real and pressing concern for a large number of countries. So much so that states with nuclear ambitions increasingly try to justify their intentions by reference to the presumed failure of the existing nuclear weapon states to disarm. But that does not stand up to

closer examination. The existing nuclear weapon states have reduced their arsenals and are continuing to do so, yet proliferation continues. Would nuclear disarmament by some reduce the nuclear ambitions of others? That seems unreliable as a basis for military planning, and it is the opposite of the way the world works.

The Cold War may be over, but the danger of regional confrontation remains. Not long ago two members of this Conference came dangerously close to a nuclear exchange, yet we were unable even to address that issue. In other regions too, tension is higher than it could or should be, and nuclear weapons are a factor in the equation. So progress towards nuclear disarmament should remain a priority, and an urgent one.

The nuclear weapon states, at least those that are party to the NPT, have accepted a treaty obligation to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament. It is the responsibility of those states to make sure that they are fulfilling that obligation. We also hope that those that have developed nuclear weapons outside the NPT will pursue similar disarmament objectives alongside us. That way we might begin to see some progress. The next step would be an agreement to arrest the creation of new fissile material for nuclear weapons. Together with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which I firmly believe will eventually enter into force, this would create the platform on which further progress could be built.

What we shall not get is a giant leap towards nuclear disarmament. The inevitability of gradualism will continue to operate for obvious reasons. Once the perception of threat is eliminated, the salience of nuclear weapons in security policy will lessen. Taxpayers in democratic countries will surely refuse to bear the burden of maintaining expensive weapons when the need for them has passed. But that will require better verification than can currently be guaranteed. Fortunately, verification technology is likely to advance.

How we get from here to there must in my view be through a process of small steps. If there is one thought I would like to leave with you it is this. Blocking the small steps by insisting that the great leap must come first is a recipe for ensuring that nothing will happen. It is a policy that might almost have been invented by those who want to prevent progress. It is undoubtedly a major obstacle to getting the CD back to work.

On a more personal note, I have greatly enjoyed working with all of you here in Geneva. The subjects we deal with may be slow and frustrating, but there is a real sense of common effort. I have made many friends among colleagues here, and I have always appreciated the professionalism and co-operative spirit of those with whom relations could not be so close. I am grateful to the secretariat and the interpreters for all their support. I am sure that the Geneva disarmament community deserves to survive and prosper, and I believe it will.