

Concluding Statement  
by the President of the Conference on Disarmament,  
Ambassador Chris Sanders of the Netherlands  
(Thursday, 17 February 2005)

Today's session of the CD is the last one for me to preside over. I look back on my Presidency with mixed feelings. Let me share a few thoughts with you.

I enjoyed very much working with all of you in an open and transparent manner. I detected a great eagerness among you to get the CD back to work. To get it to do the job it should do.

Yet, I also experienced a degree of fear. Fear of change. Sticking to old formula, clinging to precedents. I think that any organization that fails to innovate will be in danger. The High Level Panel Report shows that in fostering global security, innovation is crucial. And that it should be based on a new, comprehensive approach to security. A truly *collective* security. It says, and I quote:

“What is needed today is nothing less than a new consensus between alliances that are frayed, between wealthy nations and poor, and among peoples mired in mistrust across an apparently widening cultural abyss. The essence of that consensus is simple: we all share responsibility for each other's security. And the test of that consensus will be action”(unquote).

I know, any change or innovation means risks could be involved. To repeat well known, worn out positions may give us a sense of comfort. Why not stay on the safe side? The answer is simple: staying on the safe side means, in our case, immobility. Immobility means regression in a dynamic and globalised world. And staying on the safe side definitely means: missing out on the opportunities that might just offer progress to all.

I come from a country with an old tradition of seafaring, of looking over the horizon. When we started exploring the world in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were no maps, only uncharted waters. Often, we had no idea where we might end up. The risks involved in any expedition were considerable. But in the end the rewards of these explorations were considerable, certainly in the context of those times.

I think the CD must face the challenges of today's world, and muster the necessary courage to overcome these challenges, to start sailing uncharted waters, to take up opportunities which all of us know are out there. This applies obviously in particular to new issues. The CD has until now not been affected by UN reform, and it seems difficult to agree on any reform in this Conference. 2 years ago a special coordinator on improved and effective functioning of the CD could not reach consensus on any improvement. What does the High Level Panel report mean for the CD? I can only express the hope that the spirit of this report would trickle down into the CD machinery and would make it work better.

But innovation of our worn-out mechanism is not sufficient to get the CD back to work. Because the core of its problem is political. A small number of CD members are still not in a position to accept balanced compromise solutions on the core issues.

I have tried once more to bring the CD back to these core issues. I believe that with a little bit more flexibility we can get the CD back to work. I fail to see how discussions on improving security in space, or how discussions on dealing with the subject of nuclear disarmament, could threaten anyone's security interests. I am convinced that making a treaty on fissile material would enhance security for all of us. I also think that non-nuclear weapon states do have a legitimate right to address the issue of effective security assurances. In short, I simply fail to see the actual problem, although I know it is there.

Maybe I am not careful enough; maybe I do not see the great dangers involved in any of these activities. But I do not think that is the case. What I do know, is that maybe I am prepared to face the risks that any of these activities might entail. And so are quite some others. My message remains that the advantages of starting work on these issues far outweigh the risks.

I have been working in good faith on these issues. We have seen some movement in the course of the development of the A-5 proposal, although this is already some time ago. Effective multilateralism presupposes a genuine attitude to take each other's proposals seriously. It also means that if you cannot accept a certain proposal, you explain your reasoning behind it, and subsequently you put forward a credible counter-proposal. You cannot simply continue saying no, or making proposals which you know will stand no chance of getting any support.

So, this brings me to the question where we are today. I did my consultations with all of you on the basis of specific questions. I offered you my assessment of the situation in a non-paper, and I hope that many of you could share some of those findings. Subsequently, I felt that as the first president of the year I had at my disposal a rather unique provision, mandating me to identify special coordinators. There was widespread support for such an approach. But in the end I wanted to avoid a confrontational situation, that might have made the situation in the CD even worse than it already is.

So I went back to basics, and offered my personal assessment of what we might realistically try to do to bridge the existing differences on a programme of work. Not as an alternative to any existing proposal, but to make you and your capitals think. That is why it is called food-for-thought. That is also why I will not convene an informal session of the CD today. It is simply too early. And I do not want you to start shooting too early. Wait until my successor is there.

That brings me to the weeks ahead. I have the fullest confidence in my successor. I have worked in close consultation with him. I did not make any step without his consent. He will do his own job, have his own approach, and justly so. But I also know he agrees with me that we should keep the focus on the priority issues and not distress ourselves with imaginings. I wish Tim Caughley every bit of success, and I really hope he will find the decisive elements to get the CD back to work.

I thank all the Members of the CD for their support and cooperation, in particular, as I said on Tuesday, those who made themselves available in case we would have had special coordinators, and also the 5 remaining CD presidents for the year 2005.

I thank the Secretary-General and his Deputy and the staff of DDA and the Secretariat, for their tireless support of my work. They were always there when I needed them. Finally I wish to thank our interpreters; I am sure that if there has been any misunderstanding about what I said, it is not the translation but only I who is to blame.

Thank you.