It is an honour for Ireland to assume the sixth Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2013. This is only the second time that Ireland has assumed the Presidency since we became a member in 1999.

As Ireland’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade noted in his address to the Conference on 27th February this year, “Over several decades, this Conference has played a central role in promoting the rule of law in disarmament.” That sentiment was echoed by each of the high level speakers who addressed this Conference during our 2013 session. At the same time, he and a significant majority of those high level speakers and delegations referred to the ongoing impasse in this body.

In Resolution 67/72 last year, the General Assembly called on the Conference to “further intensify consultations and explore possibilities for overcoming its ongoing deadlock”. I would like to pay tribute to Ambassador Naziri Asl of Iran, Ambassador Wibowo of Indonesia, Ambassador Mehta of India and Ambassador Dekany of Hungary for responding to that call with skill, dedication and enthusiasm.

To our immediate predecessor, Ambassador Ismail of Iraq and his team, I would also like to express my appreciation and admiration for the way in which they tackled the task of President. The adoption of a decision by the Conference last Friday based on CD/1956 Rev.1 offers the Conference a significant opportunity which I hope we can collectively use to get the Conference back to negotiation of multilateral legally binding instruments in the field of disarmament.

The Informal Working Group which the Conference has decided to establish with a mandate to “produce a programme of work that is robust in substance and progressive over time in implementation” owes a great deal to Secretary-General Tokayev for planting an idea and to Ambassador Ismail for nurturing that idea to reality.

The responsibility for drafting and presenting a Programme of Work for the consideration of the Conference, naturally, remains with the President, in accordance with Rule 29 of our Rules of Procedure. My delegation considers that the Informal Working Group will provide invaluable assistance to the President in preparing a draft Programme of Work for...
consideration by the Conference. I will contact Ambassador Gallegos of Ecuador as Co-Chair of the Group and will meet with him and the vice-Co-Chair, Ambassador Woolcott of Australia, as early as possible this week. I shall brief you on our consultations at the earliest opportunity. The decision to establish the Informal Working Group states that the Co-Chair, Ambassador Gallegos of Ecuador, shall establish the Group’s timetable, in consultation with the President. I hope that it will be possible to start work in the coming days.

In addition to the responsibility to seek consensus on a Programme of Work, one of the responsibilities also entrusted to Ireland as final President of the Conference in 2013 is the drafting of the annual report, with the assistance of the Secretariat, for consideration by the membership.

Colleagues,

Before commencing work on the report and before the Informal Working Group commences its work, my delegation felt that it might be worth reflecting on some ways in which the Conference, in the future, might wish to examine how it works. Yesterday the Secretariat circulated an informal paper prepared by Ireland in which we set out some questions on which we believe that it would be worthwhile to reflect. Accordingly, I have suggested for today’s plenary meeting that we look at wider landscape issues regarding the work of the Conference and its structures. The Conference has proven, through the decision to establish the Informal Working Group, that it is prepared to think outside the box. As we approach the final weeks of the Conference’s 2013 session, it may also be timely to reflect on wider issues in terms of the revitalisation of the CD, and how the Conference may fulfil the mandate entrusted to it.

Colleagues,

This Conference is at a critical juncture. It is clear to all of us – certainly it is clear to the UN system and the wider international community - that the Conference - the world’s multilateral disarmament negotiation forum has been for many years paralysed and has failed to meet its responsibilities. We have had successive Presidents this year consult on or propose possible draft Programmes of Work. The failure to agree on any of these draft Programmes of Work means our problem really goes far beyond this chamber. The establishment of an Informal Working Group to produce a Programme of Work that is “robust in substance and progressive over time in implementation” offers us a new opportunity to work collectively to achieve our common goals. It is an opportunity that we cannot afford to waste.

The informal paper circulated asks some questions on how we might move forward. The starting point surely has to be that it is important to the UN and the international community that a central disarmament negotiating body should exist and that it should function effectively.
The failure of this body to work over many years is not a neutral fact: it has meant that work to advance the multilateral disarmament topics set out in our agenda is either not being done or, increasingly, the focus of work on them has moved elsewhere. And this reality is a substantial challenge to this Conference. We need, therefore, to look imaginatively and creatively at why we have failed to negotiate treaties in the Conference – that is what we are here for – and what we, and our capitals, can do to reverse what has been, honestly, a process of stagnation and paralysis. We all know this. We have to decide what to do about it. CD/1956 Rev.1 is a good and new step forward it is up to us how to proceed.

I would now like to outline briefly my approach to preparing the draft of the Conference’s annual report. With the assistance of the Secretary General, I have prepared a draft report, as required by Rule 44, for the consideration of the membership. In preparing the report, I was guided by the report that the Conference agreed in 2012, being the most recent report we agreed as a Conference, and also by other previous annual reports. I have also been guided by Rule 45 of the Rules of Procedure which sets out elements of what a draft report should contain. I hope that delegations will conclude that the draft reflects the requirement set out in Rules 45 that the report shall be “...factual and reflect the negotiation and work of the Conference.”

At the end of today’s meeting, I will outline the schedule for consideration of the draft annual report.

So, as President over the coming four weeks I look forward to working with and serving all delegations. We have work to do and I believe we can do this work effectively and in ways that take account of the views of all members of the Conference.