Mr. President,

As this is the first time that I take the floor under your Presidency, please allow me to commend you and your team for the great efforts that you have already put into your Presidency and assure you of the full support of my delegation. We thank you for the first draft of the report that you have circulated. After a preliminary study, we are confident that under your able leadership we will complete this task in an effective manner.

The Conference on Disarmament has been entrusted by the United Nations with the mandate to negotiate vitally important treaties in the area of disarmament. Taking one area as an example, we have been facing 16 years of stalemate in bringing about negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The existence of nuclear weapons continues to pose an inherent threat to the survival of humanity. The humanitarian imperative underlines the urgency for my country to get multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations started. The continued deadlock in the CD is therefore of utmost concern to us.

We express our appreciation to Ambassador Ismail of Iraq for his tireless efforts during his Presidency that resulted in the decision to establish the informal working group. We would also like to pay tribute to Secretary General Tokayev for presenting the Conference with a range of pertinent proposals for revisiting the working methods of the CD. We would also like to express our appreciation to the preceding Presidencies of Hungary, India, Indonesia and Iran for their committed efforts made towards overcoming the stalemate in the CD.
We welcome the establishing of an informal working group to produce a programme and hope that this group will fulfil its mandate and help to bring the CD back on track to start the negotiations it has been mandated for. We will benefit from the skilful leadership of Ambassador Gallegos of Ecuador and Ambassador Woolcott of Australia as we have seen already in its first meeting yesterday. The adoption of a programme of work would not be an objective in itself, but an important step towards the commencement of treaty negotiations.

Last year, a number of important initiatives have been launched in the UN General Assembly that aim at overcoming the deadlock in multilateral disarmament negotiations. The Open-ended Working Group in our view has provided a much needed space for the UN membership, international organisations and civil society stakeholders to start building bridges and establishing common ground in the area of multilateral nuclear disarmament. We have seen that this joint effort by the General Assembly resulted in substantial interactive discussions with a view to identify common ground. The OEWG thus makes an important contribution to taking multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations forward.

Mr. President, you have offered the Conference a range of elaborate thoughts on the challenges that the CD has been facing and on future direction. We concur with your analysis and would like to offer the following three observations:

First, on the limited membership of the CD: The objective of the Conference on Disarmament is to negotiate and bring to a conclusion multilateral treaties. As pointed out in the President’s informal paper, the rules of procedure require the Conference to review the membership of the Conference at regular intervals. We would consider it high time for such a review in a comprehensive way. Proposals on how such a review could be conducted have already been offered, including the appointment of a Special Coordinator for the question of membership. I say “membership” and not enlargement, as it is the view of this delegation that a multilateral negotiation forum that tackles issues of collective security that impact on all states by definition should provide the possibility for all states to be democratically represented in these negotiations.

Second, on the working methods in the CD: Is it lack of mutual trust or of political will that prevents the members of the Conference from overcoming the deadlock at the purely procedural level? Could a revision of working methods play a role in breaking this deadlock? My delegation believes that we would need to pull all three strings together. In terms of working methods, the informal paper of the President offers starting points for flexible, elastic approaches that would in our view merit further reflection by CD members. A collective effort of revisiting the manner the consensus rule – well functioning in other areas of the UN General Assembly’s work – is being applied in the CD seems essential to us. We could even go further and look into the issue whether the rules of procedure need changes in order to facilitate taking decisions.
Third, on the lack of civil society inclusion in the CD: Civil society has become a key partner for governments in negotiating key multilateral disarmament and arms control treaties and as such – a partner for success. Governments have recognized that collective security for the people can never be achieved without the involvement of the people. Exclusion leads to poor results when it comes to implementation. In an interconnected world we all depend on each other. We should also be aware of the rich expertise and wealth of knowledge of civil society stakeholders that we are constantly missing out as we fail to reach out to them.

To open the doors of the CD for more democracy – would be an important ingredient for finally overcoming the impasse that we are all bemoaning. We look forward for this important discussion to be further deepened and would hope that this would result in concrete proposals for reform of the CD's work.

I thank you.