Statement by
Ambassador Johannes Landman,
Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the Conference on Disarmament

United Nations General Assembly
60th Session
First Committee

Cluster
Disarmament Machinery

New York, October 18th 2005
Mr. Chairman,

This year, the fundamental crisis in disarmament manifested itself across the broad spectrum of the disarmament machinery. No programme of work in the CD. No programme of work yet in the UNDC. No final document of the NPT review. And, most embarrassingly, no language at all on disarmament and nonproliferation in the Outcome Document of the recent World Summit.

Most of us will agree it is not a flaw in the disarmament machinery itself which is at the origin of the coma-like situation we experience in disarmament.

It is also not the much-quoted ‘political will’ which is lacking. The quasi-unison statements, the virtual convergence on the subject in the general debate speak for themselves. The initiative by six states to get the CD back to work, is in any case a clear reflection of a profound malaise.

Rather than blaming the machinery, getting work done on disarmament is hampered by an inability to come to a joint security analysis. Earlier this year, Secretary-General Annan put the finger on the spot, and I quote:

"Collective security today depends on accepting that the threats each region of the world perceives as most urgent are in fact equally so for all. [...] In a world of interconnected threats and challenges, it is in each country’s self-interest that all of them are addressed effectively." Unquote.

The Netherlands fully agrees with this line of thinking.

The courageous initiative by Brazil, Canada, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand and Sweden has functioned as a wake-up call. For the Conference on Disarmament, entering its ninth year of stalemate on a simple programme of work, next year would be a most unwelcome jubilee of sorts if we do not succeed in having at least a meaningful and structured debate on the core issues at hand.

We really do hope that the incoming Polish CD chair, together with the five successive chairs, will enable us, through a concerted proposal, to get out of the present situation.
Mr. Chairman,

Clearly, the disarmament machinery can function when we want it to. It is not the fault of the machinery that we are in the state we are.

That being said, this does not discharge us of the obligation to explore ways of adjusting that machinery if we see possibilities thereto, which could help to get out of the present impasse.

Our fora must remain optimally suited for effective discussions and negotiations.

They must continue to allow for a balance between the sovereign rights and security interests of all states, and the streamlined input from regional and cross-regional coalitions.

Also, the disarmament machinery cannot continue to function effectively without a mode; further opening up to the outside world. Here I wish to refer to last year’s report by the Panel of Eminent Persons on the relationship between the UN and civil society, chaired by former Brazilian president Cardoso. We see no reason for categorically excluding the recommendations of the Panel from disarmament matters.

The paralysis we face should actually be enough reason to take action. For example:

- In the field of disarmament, just as in other fields, prior to major events the practice of holding interactive hearings could be instituted between Member States and NGO representatives that have the necessary expertise on the issues on the agenda.

- A strengthened engagement of parliamentarians also in disarmament matters would be beneficial to bridging what the Cardoso report recognizes as “the democracy deficit on the international level”.

- Of course, the establishment of a trust fund to increase the participation of representatives of NGOs from developing countries, as announced by the Secretary General, is an important part of those measures.

Mr. Chairman,

If UN reform turns out to be possible except for the disarmament machinery, then there must be something wrong in the way we operate.

Over the past two years, we have made a modest beginning in improving the effectiveness of the First Committee’s methods of work. The seminar on that subject, which the Netherlands organized two weeks ago, showed that most of the work still needs to be done.

One consistent point being made in that debate is not to treat First Committee reform in a vacuum. We couldn’t agree more. Continuous attention is needed to have the whole disarmament machinery well-oiled and up-to-date.

Let me stress that the Netherlands is committed to contributing further to this important debate.