Pakistan

Statement by Ambassador Masood Khan, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Geneva, at the First Committee

New York; October 18, 2005

Thematic Debate on Disarmament Machinery

Disarmament machinery, as it exists today, is eminently suited to deal with the matters of disarmament and international security. Political divisions are blocking forward movement on key issues. Current difficulties stem from relations between member states, their priorities, proffered linkages between different issues, and the prevalent security interests of states.

The UN Summit this year could not agree on the language on disarmament and non-proliferation for inclusion in the Outcome Document, thus signalling absence of a consensus on these issues. The machinery and the Decalogue fashioned by SSOD I do not seem to be holding well. Such hiatus is bound to affect the working of the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament (CD), and the UN Disarmament Commission. The CD is already passing through a period of chronic impasse and the UN DC is in a state of near paralysis. That leaves the First Committee.

We must not forget that the UN General Assembly and the First Committee are political bodies representing sovereign states. If there is no direction at the strategic level, the bodies dealing with disarmament and non-proliferation are bound to suffer from varying degrees of inaction and hesitation. When there is a serious deadlock at the political level, active delegations start wondering if there is something wrong with the procedures or methods of work.

First Committee Chairs are taking initiatives to rationalise the agenda and resolutions. Reform of the Committee’s methods of work or streamlining of the agenda or resolutions and their periodicity must be based on a cogent, clearly stated mission statement. The change we are seeking should be substantive, not cosmetic. The basic objective should be enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the First Committee.

The question of the merger of resolutions or changing freestanding resolutions into omnibus resolutions should be left to the sponsors. If they do so voluntarily, well and good. Otherwise they should be encouraged to make their resolutions sharper and more operative. Rationalisation of the agenda should not be used to remove subjects of vital importance, because some countries would not want to address them. If the recommendations in resolutions presented year after year, are not rising to the occasion, there should be found to implement them more effectively, not to remove resolutions from the shelf.

A resolution reflects aspirations of multiple sponsors and constituencies. While resorting to the simple device of merger, inherent thematic integrity of a resolution cannot be preserved unless the sponsors have decided to rationalise the text through
consultations. More vigour should go into implementing the resolutions than looking at the size and shape of the paper.

Of course, delegations can try to refine the agenda and streamline resolutions. This requires a consultative process. Consultations can start during the First Committee sessions, but they will be more productive if they could be held during the inter-sessional period either in New York or Geneva.

It is increasingly difficult to justify a prolonged period of inactivity in the Conference on Disarmament. The CD delegations do act as a nucleus for other disarmament related activities, but in the CD itself nothing much is happening. Despite this failure, it is important to ensure continuity of the sole negotiating forum on disarmament.

Three reasons come to mind for doing so: the CD has survived such periods of inactivity in the past; it still acts as a vehicle for exchange of views on security issues; and it is difficult to revive a forum once it has been partially or fully suspended. Exchange of views is fine, but the CD cannot hold town hall meetings. It is a negotiating, not a deliberative forum. In order to fill the growing vacuum, all we can hope to do is to hold discussions that can create an enabling environment for negotiations and serve as a useful prelude to actual negotiations. The differences on a programme of work are quintessentially political, not procedural. Six delegations this year gave, what they called, a 'wake up call' to the CD. We understand their motivation and disappointment. Our fear was that ad hoc, parallel mechanisms could have hurt the CD and disrupted the delicate balance between the four core issues.

The existing machinery includes treaty bodies some of which are working fine. The IAEA is strong and resilient. The OPCW has an impressive track record. There are institutional deficits in other WMD regimes. But conventional wisdom and empirical evidence have established that multilateralism ensures both longevity and legitimacy of such regimes. Secretary General Kofi Annan has rightly observed in his report to Larger Freedom that exclusive or non-institutionalised forums will not have legitimacy in the long run.

If we want to work towards a new consensus to achieve disarmament and non-proliferation or revalidate the existing agreements, the disarmament machinery can deliver provided we decide to use it. A new security consensus should take into account the need to address existing and emerging challenges to international and regional security. We can pursue this goal through the Conference on Disarmament or a special session of the UN Commission on Disarmament. We also reiterate our proposal that you, Mr. Chairman, could hold informal consultations to help the Committees focus on a host of institutional and substantive issues that need to be addressed by the disarmament machinery.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman