SWEDEN

REMARKS

BY

AMBASSADOR ELISABET BORSIIN BONNIER
HEAD OF THE SWEDISH DELEGATION
TO THE FIRST COMMITTEE
ON THE DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -
Remarks on The Disarmament Machinery

The rule of law is a fundamental principle in domestic affairs. The fact that some citizens might break the law does not make laws less important. The same goes for international affairs. The disarmament machinery has played a fundamental role in producing vital pieces of international law, and it has created mechanisms to monitor that treaties and norms are being upheld. But lacunae remain both on the legal side and the implementation side. The disarmament machinery should be mobilised to fill these gaps.

It is disturbing to sometimes see a reluctance to be bound by international norms and agreements freely entered into, and an unwillingness to enter into new binding agreements. This is particularly disturbing at a time when globalization makes weapons and weapon technologies more and more accessible and security problems more and more inter-connected globally. Rejecting the use of the disarmament machinery to develop necessary roles and norms and to strengthen verification and compliance carries significant risks for the security of us all.

We need focused and concerted efforts to operationalise and implement existing commitments. Key words are compliance, implementation and verification. We need to feel confident that treaties and agreements entered into are not discarded. The recently concluded NPT Review Conference is a case in point. And year after year the UNGA passes resolutions which are not implemented. And year after year key disarmament issues are put on a CD program of work, which is not adopted. So we must ask ourselves: What can be done to hold states accountable for non-implementation and for the present inertia in the disarmament machinery?

Some say that the disarmament agenda is outdated, that we should bring in new issues. Percentages, threats and challenges evidently change over time. And will continue to do so. But the emergence of new dangers does not alleviate the burden of dealing with the old ones, and addressing the old ones is no reason not to face up to new ones. The present debate of old versus new threats is a false debate and the effect has largely been that neither is dealt with. Instead of fruitless debates where some agenda priorities are pitched against others, we should open our minds, and the agenda, to all global security concerns. Be they old or new.

It is a common phenomenon that when diplomats and bureaucrats fail with the substance, blame is put on the machinery and its procedures. We must not fall into that trap. The main difficulty is not the machinery itself. The machinery is nothing else than us. Of course we can always do some sound housekeeping to make it smoother and more effective. But the key problem is our inability to fully utilise the potentials of all its parts. That goes for the UNGA and its First Committee, it goes for the UNDC, for the CD and it goes for the various review process connected to the body of international treaties.

We could also be a lot more flexible in utilising the inter-relationship and possible interaction between the various parts of the machinery and between different UN fora. This could take different forms. The handling of the issue of weaponization of
oyster space would, for example, benefit from a better understanding of the work of COPUS and UNISPACE III. And the potentials of the mechanisms and capabilities at the disposal of the Secretary-General and the Security Council could be more systematically explored.

These overriding aspects notwithstanding, I do believe that we need to reassess the way we work, our modus operandi - not as a substitute for substance but because some of the working-styles from the cold war period has become counter-productive.

The present geographical groupings were established for election purposes. They still serve that purpose reasonably well. But during the cold war they were also used for position taking in negotiating processes. Today like-minded states and common interests are found in all groupings. Time has come for working much closer together across the geographical groupings. The New Agenda Coalition, NAC, is one example. Recently seven nations joined together to try to rally support for the inclusion of non-proliferation and disarmament in the Outcome Document. I believe that we will see more "intercontinental" groupings like these in the future - because they are needed.

A few weeks ago, here in the First Committee another six countries, my own among them, took an initiative to try to break the dead-lock in the CD. The simple idea was to use a well established mechanisms of the UNGA, and unused funds allocated to the CD, to get some work done until such a date when the CD agrees on a program of work. Time was not quite ripe and the idea was too unconventional for some. For the time being it will be kept on the backburner while, hopefully, other creative alternatives will emerge while the CD is given a sixth year to find an effective way forward.

We also need to reflect on how consensus rules are being applied. Is it reasonable that procedural vetoes can be systematically and routinely put into play to prevent substantive discussions from even beginning? For three out of four weeks the NPT Review Conference was effectively blocked this way. For 8 years the CD has similarly been stymied. Consensus requirement on substance, once the discussions/negotiations are under-way is quite another matter. The right to say No is absolutely legitimate and essential when national security matters are at stake, not the least for smaller nations outside defence alliances.

In conclusion: Much could and should be done to make the disarmament machinery more effective. But to get out of present stalemate and to meet the security challenges in an era of galloping globalization we all need to approach our common multilateral system with an attitude of co-operation and compromises, of give-and-take rather than confrontations based on "all or nothing", "my way or no way". Business as usual meaning no business at all, is simply not an option.