Mr. Chairman:

It appears that in the past two and a half years there has been a tendency to regard the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) as irrelevant. It is perceived as the least relevant of the three main multilateral disarmament machinery in the UN system; something that has outlived its purpose and should be left to fade out of existence. One wonders whether this perception has anything to do with the fact that the Commission did not hold any substantive meeting this year, and that its bureau was not even fully constituted until the last two days of the organizational session last July.

Perhaps, as far 2005 is concerned, it was due to the disappointment and frustrations of the NPT Review Conference. Maybe it was also due to scheduling problems - summer was perhaps not the best time to hold session of the UNDC.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to speak about UNDC in relation to the First Committee. Evidently the First Committee is the only major multilateral disarmament machinery in the United Nations system that appears to be taking its work seriously. At least the Committee agreed that we should talk, we should have interactive debates on clusters of disarmament and international security issues; that we should, as we are doing now, discuss the disarmament machinery.

Here lies the irony Mr. Chairman. The First Committee comprises all Member States of the United Nations. It is not short of agenda items. There are for instance over thirty sub-items under Item 14 General and complete disarmament. In fact we are trying to merge some of the agenda items as part of the process of improving the Committee’s working methods. The UNDC also comprises the same membership -- all the member States of the
Organization. However, the Commission cannot do any substantive work because of disagreement over its agenda — an agenda of not more than three items.

Mr. Chairman this is situation is something relatively new. Yesterday, many delegations spoke about the important contributions that the Commission has made to disarmament and international security. Ambassador Mayer of Canada for instance reminded us that the UNDC had shown the potential, over the years, to formulate consensus principles, guidelines and recommendations on a large number of subjects, that when it is able to work, its treatment of various problems in the field of disarmament can serve to guide multilateral efforts towards enhanced cooperation and more effective action. Having had the privilege of a rewarding exposure to the work of the Commission over the years, and having served in its bureau a few years ago, I can concur with the statements about the achievements of UNDC.

Mr. Chairman, last summer we utilized the Commission’s full potential and succeeded in breaking a two year deadlock. The Report of the Commission for 2005 (document A/60/42) speaks for itself. The verbatim records will also provide a better picture of what transpired during the discussions and negotiations. Without exaggeration, I should say we were working in a new or revitalized UNDC.

However, Mr. Chairman please allow me to paraphrase my closing remarks to the Commission at its 266th meeting on 26 July 2005. I said that no one should underestimate what we had accomplished in five informal meetings in June and July, and three days from 18-20 July, against all odds and against our own expectations. That accomplishment should not be totally overshadowed by other problems which arose towards the end of the meetings. The Commission was sending a message to the General Assembly through the First Committee and the international community at large that the Commission was viable and ready to resume its full responsibilities as a specialized body with a specific mandate from the Assembly.

I said that the Commission was also sending a message to the CD in Geneva that current challenges demand a change of attitude in our deliberations on disarmament and international security. Although the outcome of the Commission’s organizational meeting was difficult to explain to the outside world there was, unlike in the previous year, a breakthrough in 2005. It did reach some agreements. However, the Commission was reluctant to endorse
those agreements. As Chair I described it as reluctance, rather than a failure. This is not semantics. On the contrary, it is an objective evaluation of the proceedings. This is what I meant when I said that what was accomplished should not be totally eclipsed by other problems that everyone recognized. We had taken a major step forward.

The First Committee, its weaknesses notwithstanding, is capable of changing the misconceptions about the viability or relevance of the UNDC. It now has the opportunity to demonstrate that capacity in the manner in which it deals with the Report of the Commission for 2005 which is currently before us. Yesterday, Ambassador Bonnier of Sweden rightly pointed out that “the main difficulty is not the machinery itself, the machinery is nothing else than us.” As she put it, the key problem is our inability to fully utilize the potentials of all its parts.

I must say that with the determination and cooperation of its members we did utilize the full potential of the Commission last July. As I said, we succeeded in establishing a new coalition for the revitalization or resuscitation of a Commission that had remained virtually dormant over the past two years. The participants in the June/July meeting should be commended for their diligence in pursuing what mayy thought was a futile exercise.

Mr. Chairman: “It was a disgrace that our leaders could not agree, even on a single sentence, about how to tackle one of the most urgent challenges of our time, the threat of weapons of mass destruction.” These are not my words Mr. President. They are words of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, two days ago. Throughout the general and thematic debates of this Committee, delegations expressed similar disappointment about the outcome of the NPT Review Conference, the recent United Nations Summit, and the proceedings of the Committee on Disarmament (CD).

Now, there is still hope that the First Committee can make all the difference in this litany of disappointments. The Committee can among other things recognize or acknowledge what the Disarmament Commission has done this year, albeit a small step forward, in fulfilling its mandate. This should at least serve as an incentive for the Commission to maintain the momentum of July 2005.
Based on the extensive consultations I have conducted over the last four months as well as on the quality of interregional dialogue that I encouraged and witnessed in July, I have come to the conclusion that no one would like to see a dormant or dying Disarmament Commission.

Well, I hope no one proves me wrong. It is up to the First Committee to determine whether the Chair’s conclusion is right or wrong.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.