Follow-up to the High Level Meeting held on 24 September 2010 - Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations.

Statement by
Ambassador Hellmut Hoffmann
New York, October 18th 2010
Mr. Chairman,

The German delegation associates itself with the statement made by the European Union on the Disarmament Machinery and with the statement delivered by Austria on behalf of the co-sponsors, of which Germany is one, of draft resolution L.34 entitled

"Follow-up to the High Level Meeting held on 24 September 2010 - Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations."

Mr. Chairman,

The German delegation welcomes the decision by General Assembly to include in its agenda an additional item which allows us to have a focused debate on the issues which were at the heart of the High Level Meeting convened by the Secretary General on 24 September, namely revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

A new momentum has emerged in the field of disarmament and arms control. My delegation has noted with satisfaction that nearly all delegations have underlined this point in the General Debate.

Many have called on the international community to seize this opportunity.

Indeed, after a lost decade, the international community should now unite in making this a decade of disarmament!

Let us, in particular, make every effort in moving ahead towards a world free of nuclear weapons - a goal the international community has committed itself to in many instruments and other documents already for well over half a century.

Which brings me directly to the Conference on Disarmament.

For nearly 15 years the CD has been unable to do what it is tasked to do, that is to negotiate new instruments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

It was therefore high time that this untenable situation has become the subject of a High Level Meeting in the margins of the General Assembly of the United Nations.
Germany thanks the Secretary General for having taken the initiative of convening this meeting on 24 September and Germany welcomes the suggestions he has made in his Chairman's Summary.

Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Westerwelle was delighted to demonstrate with his participation in the HLM how strongly we feel about making progress in the fields of disarmament and non-proliferation.

We are very much concerned about the state of affairs in the Conference on Disarmament.

Let me recall: At long last in May 2009 agreement was reached on a well balanced and comprehensive programme of work.

But unfortunately, as others have rightly pointed out during the general debate as well, at least one state continues to frustrate the will of the vast majority in implementing this decision, as a result of which the CD continues to be in deadlock.

We do not only have grave doubts about the wisdom of using - or should one perhaps better say: abusing ? - the consensus rule in order to block purely procedural decisions like on the adoption of work programmes. In fact, if this kind of behaviour were to become the norm in the conduct of international relations, the international community would soon face total gridlock.

But what is even more important is the fact that we cannot find the arguments persuasive we are presented with for stopping the entire international community from making progress on the important core disarmament issues which are on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament.

With respect to the specific item of FMCT I would recall what Minister Westerwelle said in the High Level Meeting: "States need not fear negotiations on a Treaty on Fissile Material (...) Their interests will be protected within the course of this process".

And let me also say this: One should not overload the circuits. The Conference on Disarmament cannot be the place to solve difficult issues which are not or cannot be part of its remit; therefore the Conference on Disarmament must not be held hostage to their solution. As is often the case, solutions to difficult issues need to be found in broader regional frameworks.

And finally: We all know that at the end of the day it remains the pre-rogative of states to decide whether to become parties to treaties or not.

So, Mr. Chairman, in light of all of this, States should consider very carefully whether it is right and legitimate to stop everybody else from getting negotiating processes on most important issues actually only started.

We are convinced that the vast majority of CD member states continues to be ready to start work along the lines of the programme of work adopted in May 2009 and we very much hope that this can actually be done early in the
coming year in Geneva.

Mr. Chairman,

Germany continues to be a strong supporter of the Conference on Disarmament.

But we are acutely aware of the ever growing frustration among states the longer the present situation persists.

No one should therefore be surprised when a need to consider other options is being talked about not only informally but also formally ever more often, as we have heard e.g. in this Committee.

Some advocate setting deadlines, some ask whether it makes sense to continue to spend significant resources on a body which does not make progress, some think about negotiating certain issues in other fora.

In this situation it appeared wise to us for the Secretary General to have suggested in his Chairman's Summary of the High Level Meeting to ask his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to undertake a thorough review of the issues at hand, including inter alia the possible establishment of a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons with special focus on the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament.

If things do not move forward in the CD soon we surely need to take a broader look at what can be done to bring the issues of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation forward.

This brings me in conclusion to draft resolution L.34:

Its operative heart is in op 4 in that it proposes to inscribe in the agenda of the next General Assembly an item which will give Member States an opportunity to discuss the state of affairs at the Conference on Disarmament and beyond that how multilateral disarmament negotiations can be taken forward in a broader sense.

After years of statement in the CD it is right that the General Assembly provides itself with this platform for further deliberation.

But let me say in conclusion: It is certainly our hope that when we will speak to this agenda item in next year's General Assembly, all of us will be able to report with satisfaction that the Conference on Disarmament has actually begun doing its proper work.