Mr Chair

Norway is firmly committed to multilateralism in disarmament and non-proliferation because we believe in inclusive and transparent processes. Our present machinery, in which the Conference on Disarmament, is proclaimed to be the sole multilateral negotiating body, is neither. Any credible and relevant multilateral negotiating body should be open to all countries. Only sixty-five countries are members to the CD. Several countries have been knocking on its door for years, but it does not seem like the question of enlargement will be revisited any time soon.

On transparency the record of the CD is poor. There is virtually no interaction with civil society. This may have been acceptable when the disarmament machinery was set up thirty years ago, but today it is not. The Conference has proven utterly incapable of adapting to a new reality. All stakeholders should be included in the disarmament processes, including relevant NGOs.

The working methods of the CD is in dire need of reforms. It is not acceptable that the consensus principle is applied in a manner which allow countries to single-handedly bring work to a standstill, which in turn has led to the marginalisation and irrelevance the CD is now facing. The practice of first seeking consensus within regional groups, set up along the lines of the Cold War, contributes further to maintaining status quo and to ensure that any outcome would be a least common denominator.

Some claim that the machinery is not the problem, and that the real problem is lack of political will. Judging from the statements at this session of the First Committee, the very clear message from the NPT Review Conference in May, and from the High-level Meeting on revitalizing the disarmament machinery on 24 September, there is plenty of political will to move forward.
The frustration over the multilateral disarmament machinery runs deep. It is particularly frustrating that at a time when the momentum on disarmament rarely has appeared stronger, the machinery in itself has become an obstacle to capitalize on this momentum. This situation is unacceptable. And therefore Norway is co-sponsoring draft resolution L34, which calls for placing the item on the Follow-up to the High-level Meeting on the agenda of next year’s session. If there has been no progress by then, it is time to switch off life support.

We should also use this opportunity to look at other parts of the disarmament machinery. The UN Disarmament Commission, established for the purpose of conducting substantive deliberations and making recommendations, has not been able to deliver anything for over a decade. We question the need to preserve the UNDC at all, but if we do, it has to be made more practical, more focussed and more relevant. We continue to believe that regular UNDC sessions should be much shorter and focus on one or two topics, decided by the UN GA First Committee.

Mr. Chair

Given its universal nature, we should also look at ways to improve the working methods of the First Committee. This body should play a crucial role in advancing the work on disarmament and non-proliferation. This is all the more important as other parts of the machinery has come to a grinding halt.

Norway has for years questioned whether the great efforts mobilised to secure the highest number of co-sponsors to resolutions is the best way to make use of our time and energy? If we could agree on limiting the practice of seeking co-sponsorship to only newly introduced resolutions, we would improve the efficiency of the First Committee. It is also Norway’s view that when a resolution has been adopted it will stand unless otherwise decided. This would enable us to get the number of repetitive resolutions down, and make more time available for substantive and focused discussions. Too many resolutions have nearly identical texts to previous years, and do not reflect new political opportunities to move the disarmament agenda forward.

Mr Chair

This year’s session of the First Committee takes place in the wake of a NPT Review Conference that sent a strong political message about the overall objective of creating a world without nuclear weapons. We need to act on this momentum, and if the present machinery is unable to facilitate action, states will find other ways.

When the working methods of the CCW stood in the way of real progress on land mines and cluster munitions, conventions that banned these weapons were negotiated outside the existing structures. The framework for deliberations and negotiations must be a function of the objectives we want to achieve. The multilateral machinery must never become an end in itself. If it does not work we must either fix it or take our business somewhere else.

Thank you Mr. Chair