ITALY

66TH SESSION OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE
OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATEMENT ON

DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

BY

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Mr. President,

We would like to commend the Netherlands, Switzerland and South Africa for having tabled draft Resolution L.39 on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. We have been involved from the very beginning in the informal meetings of like-minded countries held in Geneva to agree on a draft text and are quite pleased with the final version. This result wouldn’t have been possible without the admirable hard work carried out by the delegations of these three countries. We are confident that the Resolution will be approved by a handsome majority.

The initiative to submit the Resolution derives from the decision of the Secretary General to convene a High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on this topic in September 2010. The reason was the persistent and, frankly, intolerable incapacity of the Conference on Disarmament to agree on any program of work whatsoever (with the ephemeral exception of 2009) for the past fifteen years. The aim of draft Resolution L.39, similarly to that of its predecessor Resolution 65/93 adopted last year, is to keep political pressure undiminished and coax the CD back to productive life, meaning – of course - negotiating international instruments for disarmament and non-proliferation. Italy fully subscribes to this aim and has, since the very beginning, constantly supported the idea of the Secretary General to convene the HLM.

Paradoxically, though, in spite of the paralysis of the CD, international disarmament efforts have not been without success these past two years. We have witnessed, for example, the positive outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Very recently one of the main chapters of its Plan of Action, the convening of a conference on the creation of a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East, received a significant boost with the decision, taken by the three depository countries of the Treaty, to hold the conference in Finland and to appoint the Finnish Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs its facilitator.

We have also seen in these past months the successful negotiation, signature and ratification of the new START Treaty between Russia and the United States that will bring about a significant reduction in the atomic arsenals of the two main nuclear powers. In late 2008, the Oslo Convention banning cluster munitions was signed. My country was one of the original signatories and we ratified it last summer. Today, more than one hundred countries have joined this instrument.

The fact remains, however, that these successes were achieved outside the Conference on Disarmament, and this in spite of the fact that the Conference is defined as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of disarmament.

The more we study the failings of the CD the more we are convinced that the real problem of the Conference is not the lack of political will, though some may still hold to this view. These past days in the First Committee have shown beyond a shadow of doubt that the political will within and without the membership of the Conference on Disarmament in fact exists and is alive and healthy. Four draft resolutions that deal directly or indirectly with the CD,
its activity and ills, have been tabled this year: L.39 that I just mentioned, a Canadian one on FMCT, another one (L.21) by Austria, Norway and Mexico on taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations, and finally one by Cuba on the 2011 Annual Report of the Conference on Disarmament. In Geneva this spring, furthermore, Australia and Japan took the initiative to organize a 9-day long side event on specific aspects of FMCT, on the margins of the Conference on Disarmament, that has been instrumental in clarifying for future reference a number of complex questions pertaining to this treaty. Finally, we must mention with appreciation the work in progress among the P5 to arrive at a common outlook on FMCT within the CD and their steady efforts to involve in this exercise also the three states possessing nuclear weapon not parties to the NPT.

Mr. President,

The real problem of the Conference on Disarmament, therefore, is not the alleged lack of political will among its members. In our opinion, what is thwarting the CD is, instead, the misuse of its Rules of Procedure by a small few who, for reasons of political necessity however legitimate, prevent the majority, who have equally valid and legitimate political reasons, to get on with negotiating disarmament and non-proliferation agreements. I will recall that at the end of May 2009 the Conference on Disarmament did in fact adopt by consensus a program of work that included negotiations but that it was then unable to implement it because one country prevented reaching a further consensus on altogether much more mundane issues, not really pertaining to national security, such as on which days of the week to hold the meetings of the ad-hoc working groups, in which rooms, and chaired by whom.

Other provisions of the Rules of Procedure also warrant a reappraisal. The monthly rotation of the Presidency appears to be too frequent, to the detriment of the continuity of the Conference’s work. Maybe, as a preliminary suggestion, we could envision two six-month presidencies per year. Also, the President’s decision-making authority could be better defined to allow him to take routine decisions without the need to first consult with the membership.

Furthermore, the rule requiring the adoption every year of a new program of work appears to be unwise. It allows any member, on the 1st of January, to indefinitely block any further negotiations it no longer approves of by withholding assent on extending them for a further year in the provisions of the program of work, a likely scenario if we consider that to conclude any treaty dealing with disarmament and non-proliferation takes far longer than one year. A way to correct this would be that an already approved program of work’s validity is automatically extended every 31st of December unless a new program of work is agreed upon by consensus.

Therefore, we believe that further thought should be given to the working methods of the CD to make them more attuned to its reason of existence.

Having said all this, we are not blind to the postulate that there are no procedural solutions to political problems, as our Foreign Minister Frattini stated last year. Nonetheless, we
are also convinced that addressing this problem can no longer be postponed and we must do it with courage and commitment, while striving to solve the underlying political issues.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude by saying a few words also on the draft Resolution, presented by Cuba, on the Report of the Conference on Disarmament. Unsurprisingly, the Report is essentially a procedural document, since this year, just like the preceding fourteen, no formal work was done at the CD. Nonetheless, the text does mention the follow-up to the High-level Meeting and it does call for greater flexibility to adopt a program of work and start substantive activity in the Conference. The situation of the Conference on Disarmament is now so dire that even a procedural text such as this one could not forego the need to include an unambiguous political message. For this, we are grateful to Cuba who, as this year's last President of the CD, skilfully led the consultations in Geneva to draft this Resolution.

Thank you.