Mr. Chair,

The intergovernmental disarmament machinery is supposed to facilitate deliberations and subsequently negotiations, with the goal to reach legally binding instruments enhancing our common security and removing weapons that cause unacceptable humanitarian harm.

Negotiation bodies are not ends in themselves, their outcomes are. And negotiations can take many forms. Recent examples from humanitarian disarmament have demonstrated that it is possible to forge a political will and then translate it into tangible results that make a difference for civilians.

Mr. Chair

It follows that we should not use the existing machinery to attempt regressing norms set in multilateral negotiations that have led to important treaties effectively addressing humanitarian concerns. The current discussions on cluster munitions within the CCW may be seen as doing exactly so. This might both jeopardize the credibility of the CCW and undermine its relevance.

Mr. Chair

Today, there is undoubtedly a broad political will to further strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and to move towards a world free from nuclear weapons. This was clearly demonstrated by the outcome of the NPT 2010 Review Conference. We have seen it again in the many statements given at this session of the First Committee.

(Check against delivery)
The fact of the matter is, however, that the current machinery impedes us from translating this broad political will into concrete actions. While it could be affirmed that we must honor the outcome of the SSOD I, the fact is that this legacy from 1978 today prevents us from making genuine progress in nuclear multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. Indeed, we are now allowing those who do not seek progress to set the pace.

Norway has been open to the proposal of convening an SSOD IV, provided it could yield fast and substantial results. However, we question the wisdom in engaging in an indefinite process of consultations that may lead nowhere, just for the sake of doing it. And in reality, do we really want such a lengthy and costly process? While not excluding a SSOD IV, we should be ready to consider other options to move forward.

Mr. Chair,

Starting with a body which is located here in New York, the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) was established to conduct substantive intergovernmental deliberations and to make recommendations in this regard. Yet, the sad fact is that UNDC has not produced anything since 1999. The lack of results has greatly affected the degree and level of participation by member states in its regular sessions. Some even question the continued existence of the UNDC. Instead of continuing to lament this situation, we should explore ways to give the UNDC a meaningful role.

My delegation agrees that last session led to very useful exchange of views among member states and thus partly fulfilled its deliberative function. At the same time it is evident that it will be a tall order for the UNDC to come up with agreed and comprehensive recommendations.

One idea, also previously suggested by Norway, is that the First Committee each year could task the following UNDC to look into certain well-defined topics. The outcome of these sessions could be a Chair’s summary presenting the different, and eventually converging, views on any given topic. The next session of the First Committee may then decide on possible courses of action, drawing on the UNDC report. Also, the UNDC sessions should be shorter and more manageable, inviting more expert participation from capitals.

If we are not ready to consider ways and means to improve the functioning of the UNDC, we run the risk of further marginalizing this body.

The same can be said of the Conference on Disarmament, which is proclaimed to be the sole multilateral negotiating body. The fundamental question today is whether the CD is at all capable of reforming itself. As long as the consensus rule is applied to any procedural issue, any effort to improve its functions runs the risk of stumbling on the need to protect national interests among one or several of its 65 member states.
The limited number of member states is in itself a major problem for the legitimacy of the CD. A credible and relevant multilateral negotiating body, aiming to negotiate treaties that are to be valid for all states, should be open to all states interested in joining it.

Furthermore, the CD lacks constructive interaction with civil society. This may have been acceptable when the disarmament machinery was set up thirty years ago, but today it is not.

It is obvious that if the CD had been working as the sole multilateral negotiating body in the field of arms control, the ATT process would not have been generated from the General Assembly but would have been put on the agenda of the CD.

Mr. Chair, it is about time that the General Assembly communicates clearly to the CD and its member states that time is running out, and that there are viable alternatives to the CD that we could resort to. The resolution put forward by Austria, Mexico and Norway, drawing upon the legitimacy and authority of the General Assembly itself, is such an alternative, and there might be others as well.

Mr. Chair

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, all the more important as the other parts of the machinery have come to a standstill. Are we using our time here in an efficient way? We had a discussion about it a few years back and we should be open to look into ways to further revitalize this body.

The NPT Review Conference in 2010 sent a strong political message about the overall objective of reaching a more secure world without nuclear weapons. We need to heed this obligation.

Thank you!