UNGA 68 First Committee

Panel Discussion on Disarmament Machinery

Statement on the work of the Conference on Disarmament

H.E. Patricia O'Brien,

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ireland

To the United Nations and other International Organisations

in Geneva

President of the Conference on Disarmament

New York, 21 October 2013

Check against delivery
Mr. Chairman,

I would like to express my appreciation to you Mr. Chairman and to the Bureau and the High Representative, Ms. Angela Kane, for the invitation to take part in this panel to speak about the work of the Conference on Disarmament in its 2013 session as outlined in its report.

May I also, in a national capacity, briefly mention that it is an honour for Ireland to hold the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, a body whose contribution to international peace and security through the negotiation of multilateral disarmament instruments is without parallel.

Mr. Chairman,

Ireland assumed the Presidency of the Conference on 19 August as the sixth President in 2013. I would like to record Ireland's appreciation to each of our predecessors in 2013, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran and Iraq. In the arrangement known as the P6, the cooperation between all six Presidents throughout the 2013 session was excellent.

As the sixth President of the Conference's annual session, one of the primary tasks entrusted to Ireland was that of preparing the Conference's annual report to this Assembly. I would like record my appreciation for the collaborative and cooperative approach of all members of the Conference which allowed for the adoption by consensus of the report in an expeditious manner.

As colleagues will have seen in the report, the Secretary General of the United Nations conveyed a message to the Conference at its first plenary meeting of 2013 in which he recalled the centrality of the Conference to both disarmament negotiation
and to strengthening the rule of law in global disarmament. He also called on States to ensure that the Conference lived up to its responsibility and to revive substantive negotiations without delay.

One of the primary responsibilities of a President of the Conference, under Rule 29 of the Rules of Procedure, is to draw up, with the assistance of the Secretary-General of the Conference, a programme of work for the Conference for its consideration.

Last year in the Resolution on the annual report of the Conference, this Assembly called upon the Conference to "to further intensify consultations and explore possibilities for overcoming its ongoing deadlock of well over a decade by adopting and implementing a balanced and comprehensive programme of work at the earliest possible date during its 2013 session."

Mr Chairman As the report of the Conference clearly shows, 2013 saw particularly intensive efforts by successive Presidents to agree a Programme of Work that would enable the Conference to get back to the task envisaged for it in SSODI - the negotiation of multilateral disarmament agreements. These efforts included the drafting of three programmes of work on which, regrettably, consensus could not be achieved – these are reflected in the report. Other efforts by Presidents included intensive and extensive consultations and the hosting of a seminar.

Mr. Chairman,

As the report noted, despite these efforts, the Conference did not succeed in agreeing a Programme of Work and commencing its substantive work in its 2013 session.

On 16 August, the Conference decided to establish an informal working group to draft a programme of work that would be "robust in substance and progressive over time in implementation". That decision was adopted thanks to the efforts of Ambassador Ismail of Iraq and was inspired by the remarks of H.E. Mr. Tokayev, the Secretary General of the Conference and Personal Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Ambassador Gallegos of Ecuador and Ambassador Woolcott of Australia were appointed as Co-Chair and Vice Co-Chair of the Group which met on three occasions during the Irish Presidency. Ambassador Gallegos orally reported to the Conference on 10 September.
As President, I am deeply conscious of the tasks entrusted to me by the Conference’s Rules of Procedure which include the preparation of the draft report of the Conference and the presentation of the Resolution on the report to this Assembly. Those tasks also include the responsibility, which is entrusted to each President, of drawing up a Programme of Work for the Conference. As has been the case in previous years, at the conclusion of the Conference’s annual session, the Conference requested that the current President and incoming President consult during the intersessional period.

I look forward to consulting delegations during the coming months to seek their views on possible elements of a Programme of Work for the Conference, in doing so I shall be working closely with Israel as incoming President. I also look forward to working closely with Ambassadors Gallegos and Woolcott should they decide that they wish to convene informal consultations on the issue of the Conference’s Programme of Work in the coming months.

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to the intensive efforts to achieve consensus on a Programme of Work the Conference also had discussions on the core issues on the Conference’s agenda as well as on the important topic of the revitalisation of the Conference. These discussions provided delegations with the opportunity to set out their national positions on these items.

The task of finalising the annual report of the Conference this year was undertaken by my delegation and with the cooperation and constructive inputs of all colleagues in Geneva was agreed in an expeditious manner and I consider that it presents a fair, accurate and balanced picture of the activities of the Conference in 2013.

Mr. Chairman,

While it is for the representatives of States to negotiate multilateral instruments, that task is significantly aided by expertise from our partners who do not represent States but share our common goal of advancing disarmament. In this regard, I would like to express appreciation for the contribution that the research, analysis and activities of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research make. Throughout the 2013 session of the Conference, delegations welcomed the engagement between civil society and the Conference as well.

I would also like to place on record my delegation’s appreciation for the work of the small but dedicated team that comprise the Conference’s Secretariat. It is perhaps only when a delegation assumes the Presidency of the Conference that the extent of their contribution to our work becomes apparent.
Mr. Chairman,

In his address to the Conference on 18 June Secretary General Tokayev set out two further proposals to the Conference in addition to the Informal Working Group – the establishment of a subsidiary body to examine and make proposals on the improvement of the working methods of the conference and also on the designation of a special coordinator to examine and make recommendations on the expansion of the Conference and the role of civil society. It is the hope of my own delegation that the Conference might consider these ideas in 2014.

The advice, ideas and suggestions from Secretary General Tokayev during his tenure demonstrated his sustained engagement with the Conference. I wish to express appreciation for his leadership and wish him well in his new responsibilities.

Mr. Chairman,

As we look forward to the 2014 session of the Conference, I consider that there are grounds for optimism. However, in order for this optimism to be translated into positive results each member of the Conference will need to explore all avenues and, perhaps, think outside the box, in order to formulate a Programme of Work which would allow the Conference to resume its substantive work. That substantive work is the negotiation of multilateral disarmament agreements. As the Resolution on the report of the Conference notes, there are "a number of urgent and important issues for negotiation to achieve disarmament goals" on the Conference's agenda. The contribution of the Conference to strengthening the rule of law in disarmament is unassailable but it cannot be allowed to continue to rest on its laurels. The impressive track record of the Conference urgently needs to be further bolstered.

Thank you Mr. Chairman