REPUBLIC OF MALTA

UNGA 68 First Committee
Panel Discussion on Disarmament Machinery
Statement on the work of the
United Nations Disarmament Commission

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New York, 21st October 2013
Mr. Chairman,

I would like to begin by thanking you and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Angela Kane, for inviting me to participate in this panel discussion in my capacity as Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission for 2013. It is an honour for me to address you today on the work of the 2013 substantive session and to share with you a few personal reflections from the perspective of the Chair.

Mr. Chairman,

The substantive session of the Disarmament Commission met in April for the second year in its three-year cycle. The Commission continued to consider in Working Groups I and II the two agenda items approved in 2012, namely, “Recommendations for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons”; and “Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons”.

Both working groups had a constructive discussion and I believe that in general terms the Commission can be moderately satisfied with what it managed to achieve during this session. For the first time since 2006, the Commission has agreed to send forward to the third and final year of the cycle three Chairs’ Working Papers which should represent the starting point for further work next year. As the Report of the Commission clearly indicates the Working Papers remain the responsibility of the Working Group Chairs and in no way prejudice or prejudge the positions of delegations. In this regard I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairs of both Working Groups, Ambassador Naif bin Bandar Al-Sudairy from Saudi Arabia and Mr. Knut Langeland from Norway, as well as all members of the Bureau, for their outstanding work over the three weeks.

Clearly much work lies ahead if the Commission is to agree to recommendations before the end of its next substantive session. I do however believe that the Commission has done what it is expected to do in the second year of its three-year cycle, which is to set the stage for the third and final year.

This brings me to what the Commission is doing in a broader sense and some personal reflections on how it could perhaps do this better.

Mr. Chairman,

The United Nations Disarmament Commission was established to deliberate at an intergovernmental level and make recommendations. The Commission has a dual role – to deliberate and adopt recommendations. Unquestionably the adoption of recommendations remains at the very heart of the Commission’s mandate. I would however suggest that its deliberative function also serves an important purpose and we should not be so quick to dismiss the deliberative value of this Commission.

Free from the constraints normally associated with negotiating bodies the Disarmament Commission provides a unique forum for frank and open debate on some of the most pressing issues on the disarmament agenda. The Commission continues to provide a useful vehicle
through which delegations can better understand each other’s positions – in the process building trust and confidence among themselves. As I noted in my closing remarks, given its universal character and through the open and often informal setting in which it operates, the Commission can usefully serve as a laboratory of ideas, a sounding-board for initiatives and a clearing house for proposals that can be taken forward and developed in other disarmament fora. So, in defence of the Disarmament Commission, even when it is unable to adopt specific recommendations, as regrettable as this may be, I believe that through its deliberative function it can play a constructive role in moving forward the disarmament agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

Given the increasingly complex international environment in which we operate, I believe that, without adjustments to the manner in which it conducts its business, the Disarmament Commission will be hard pressed to deliver on the other part of its mandate in the form of agreed recommendations. Better ways need be found in which to record and lock-in even limited progress. As I have already remarked during the Commission itself I believe that the Commission’s inability to agree to recommendations stems partly from the lack of a common objective – which is why I believe the Commission would benefit greatly from a more focussed and targeted agenda. A proposal by Norway for the First Committee to task UNDC to examine clearly defined topics merits careful consideration. Along similar lines, the First Committee or the Disarmament Commission itself could decide on a subject or subjects for a thematic discussion during the first days of the Commission that could also be of benefit to the overall work of the Commission.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding allow me to briefly introduce on behalf of all members of the bureau the draft resolution entitled, “Report of the Disarmament Commission”, contained in document A/C.1/68/L.5. As members will note the draft resolution updates the resolution adopted at the 67th Session and recommends in operative paragraph 7 the continuation of the consideration of the substantive items at the Commission’s 2014 substantive session. The dates of the 2014 session in operative paragraph 8 reflect the decision of the Committee on Conferences. As in previous years I look forward to the adoption of the draft resolution by consensus.

Thank you.