First Committee: Disarmament Machinery

Panel Discussion Opening Comments by H.E. Gillian Bird
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(Check against delivery)

Thank you Chair

It was my privilege to serve as Chair of the Disarmament Commission this year – an important year for this body. As 2017 saw the first agreed UNDC outcome since 1999, we knew we had a solid foundation from which to build the next three year cycle.

Indeed, that was my priority as Chair – helping guide States parties towards continued, constructive and cooperative dialogue.

I am pleased to say that the hard work all delegations put in during April has paid off, and that we have set the UNDC on the best possible path towards repeating our 2017 success in 2020.
I also note we adopted our agenda in the shortest time since 2006. While this sounds like a small achievement, its significance is not lost on those who know the UNDC well as it stands as testament to the positive and constructive dynamic we must foster over the next two years.

We cannot be blind to fact that we will complete this cycle shortly before the tenth review conference for the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We know this RevCon will be challenging, but we also know that the UNDC can help us arrive with the wind in our sails.

In 2018, we successfully launched two working groups and I am glad to report both got off to a solid start under two excellent and experienced chairs. I am also pleased to note we achieved a perfect gender balance in this selection.

Working Group I, chaired by Ms Diedre Mills of Jamaica is addressing Nuclear Risk Reduction. In my view, this topic has not yet been fully examined in disarmament fora but will receive significant focus in 2020. UNDC can therefore deliver a timely contribution to the discourse at RevCon.
The Group will carry a Chair’s paper that incorporates a range of views into 2019 as the basis for further discussions on Nuclear Risk Reduction. If we look back to the successes enjoyed by the UNDC in the 1980s and 1990s, one of the common threads was a focussed approach. I would urge all States parties to keep that in mind when we reconvene next year.

Working Group II, chaired by Mr Jeroen Cooreman of Belgium is addressing Outer Space Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures. These discussions were at a higher level than Working Group I – unsurprising given the subject was outer space – and I note participants found them of great benefit given the lack of specific technical expertise in this field amongst those of us based here in New York.

This Group also agreed to take a Chair’s paper into 2019, which has an agreed structure and headings. I am confident that we will start to populate the document with objectives, principles and recommendation at the next session.

In my view, it was unfortunate that we fell just short of securing consensus on bringing the next session forward to February from April. I maintain that this would have made a more logical fit with the crowded disarmament calendar, and the high demands that places on delegations and available expertise.
However, I am confident the UNDC is well positioned to enjoy a productive and successful 2019 session next April. We are already on a path to further and deeper substantive discourse on two important elements of the broader disarmament landscape.

I thank you all for your trust and confidence as UNDC Chair, for your hard work, and for the positive and constructive way we approached this session.

Thank you

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