

Statement to the Conference on Disarmament by
the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs,
Mr Sergio Duarte,
on Tuesday 21 August 2007

Excellencies and colleagues

Mr President, I am grateful to you for this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament at this crucial time in its history. I appreciate also the support of Members of this body conveyed to me by your predecessor, Mr President, upon my taking up my duties as the Secretary-General's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. And I welcome this chance to take a place on this podium alongside Mr Ban Ki-moon's Personal Representative to the CD, Mr Sergei Ordzhonikidze.

Mr President, it is no accident that I have already made mention twice in this address of the United Nations Secretary-General. The importance he attaches to the work of this body will be evident from the several statements he has made to Members this year. Members will recall that in June, the Secretary-General, anticipating a turning point in the fortunes of the CD, said that a breakthrough would "demonstrate to the international community at large that the security challenges before us are not overwhelming, but can be addressed collectively".

Despite the collective efforts of this year's Presidents, of their seven Coordinators and of the entire membership, the Conference stands tantalisingly one short step away from resolving its longstanding impasse. From the relative luxury of a perspective at arms-length from the intense efforts that preceded the draft Presidential decision that lies before you, permit me to offer several observations.

The investment that has gone into reaching this year's effort to find common ground deserves careful analysis. This investment represents surely a common desire to fulfil the CD's mandate as a negotiating body rather than a forum for debate. It signifies, too, that Members are prepared to direct their energies, to a greater or lesser degree, towards four pre-eminent security priorities derived from the agenda of the Conference.

This year's investment, under the guidance of the Presidential Co-ordinators, has shown as well, that the Conference can work to a comprehensive, calibrated timetable or schedule of activities – dare I say a “programme of work” – in which engagement may be measured by the level of commitment to the issue of the moment.

I appreciate that for such engagement to be sustained, Members have been anxious to ensure that their security priorities are adequately reflected. This has been so despite the fact that the rules of procedure guarantee that each Member can protect its concerns at any decision-point along the way. As the Secretary-General noted last June, “finding a fair accommodation now would deprive no Member of the ability to assert its national position” in phases that follow. The way forward surely depends on the ability of the Conference to forge common ground on a progressive basis, issue by issue. In the broadest sense, that dynamic is the very art of negotiation, the fundamental lifeblood of this body.

The other observation I feel emboldened to make is that Members, I hope, will bring to the General Assembly in October a report and a resolution that truly reflect the intensity of the Conference's determination to demonstrate that its potential as a negotiating body is not only alive but that it is capable of realisation in the near future.

Finally, Mr President, please allow me to assure the broader Geneva disarmament community including civil society that in addition to offering my full support to the Secretary-General of the CD and its Members, I pledge my strongest commitment to all the other disarmament and non-proliferation activities that are conducted in Geneva.

Thank you Mr President.