

27 July 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Follow-Up to the High-level Meeting on Revitalizing the Work
of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral
Disarmament Negotiations**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal Representative of the
Secretary-General to the Conference,
Madam Chair of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I should have liked to be able to open this meeting by praising the work of the Conference on Disarmament. I am unfortunately unable to do so, in view of the deadlock that has gripped the Conference for more than 10 years. This has serious implications for disarmament, which, we must recall, is a key means of promoting international peace and security. It also has serious implications for the Conference and its role in global governance. If the Conference does not regain momentum, it will run the risk of being discredited and becoming completely ineffective.

In this regard, I should like to extend special thanks to our Secretary-General for his efforts to give fresh impetus to the Conference, in particular by organizing the high-level meeting in September 2010. I fully support these efforts. I also had the opportunity to express my concern about the stagnation of the Conference at the high-level meeting and in my direct address to the Conference in Geneva this past February.

The high-level meeting gave rise to a number of promising initiatives. In particular, the fact that the follow-up to the meeting has now been placed on the agenda of both the First Committee and the General Assembly will give Member States an opportunity to discuss the situation of the Conference. This is, of course, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, which provides that the General Assembly “may consider the general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments”. The General Assembly is empowered to make recommendations to Member States in this regard. I invite you to do so today.

The First Committee thus adopted a consensus resolution at the autumn session and has included the issue on the agenda for the next session. I encourage the Committee to send a strong signal to the Conference on Disarmament this year, with a view to breaking the stalemate.

In order to revitalize the Conference, the Secretary-General has also mandated the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to devote its two sessions in 2011 exclusively to the situation of the Conference on Disarmament. I hope that the recommendations in the Board's report will be considered very carefully by the members of the Conference and all the States Members of the General Assembly. I believe that the establishment of a high-level panel of eminent persons could bring a fresh perspective and revitalize the Conference. We will shortly have the chance to hear more about the Board's work in an informal meeting.

I believe it is essential to identify the true source of the impasse. Some say that the rule of consensus is to blame. This is one of the basic operating rules of the Conference, and it is always desirable for the Conference's decisions to enjoy broad support, but the rule of consensus should not become an obstacle or an implicit veto power. At the same time, this explanation is somewhat deficient. The Conference has always respected this principle, and in the past, in much more complex and polarized situations, it has shown a capacity to bring difficult negotiations to a successful conclusion.

What is lacking today is a real political will to make progress. A flexible approach that makes use of all available disarmament instruments and is based on a stronger diplomacy of negotiation and persuasion is needed in order to overcome resistance and create a climate of trust.

While I believe that informal approaches should be explored, such approaches and their outcomes must nevertheless remain within the framework of the Conference. The aim should not be to bypass the Conference and cause it to lose legitimacy, but to enable it to regain the effectiveness it had in the past. This is the goal for which we should strive and the motivation that should inspire our discussions today.

In seeking to break the current deadlock, it is important that we maintain a comprehensive approach to disarmament and non-proliferation issues. This is one of the valuable features of the programme of work adopted in 2009. This programme, though unfortunately never implemented, is the outcome of a delicate balance among the various interests and concerns of Member States. It should therefore serve as an inspiration for our efforts to move forward, and it can serve as a model for a new programme of work for the Conference. I trust that the States members of the Conference will ultimately live up to their responsibilities, negotiate a new programme of work and, most importantly, put it into practice.

The international environment has been especially propitious for disarmament in recent years, and expectations are high. We must not disappoint them. I therefore ask that you go beyond expressions of support for the Conference in your deliberations today to discuss practical ways to overcome obstacles and build the capacity to make significant strides in the area of disarmament.