



Kingdom of the Netherlands

**2019 Opening Session of the Conference on Disarmament**

**Geneva, 21 January 2019**

**Statement by H.E. Robbert Jan Gabriëlse**

**Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands  
to the Conference on Disarmament**

Mr. President

Allow me from the outset to congratulate you on the assumption of the Presidency and assure you of the full support of my delegation. Let me express my deep appreciation for the hard work of the outgoing President.

Let me also use this opportunity to welcome and congratulate a number of my colleagues on the assumption of their role in the CD: H.E. Mr. Li Song, Permanent Representative of China and H.E. Mr Pankaj Sharma, Permanent Representative of India. As well as the new Secretary of the CD, Ms. Radha Day.

The Netherlands delegation looks forward to working with all of you in this important forum.

In addition to the statement delivered by the Romanian delegation, on behalf of the European Union, I would like to deliver the following remarks in our national capacity.

Mr. President,

The start of the 2019 session of the Conference on Disarmament takes place in a global security environment, in which progress on disarmament in all its aspects is more urgent than ever. As noted by the Secretary-General in his Agenda for Disarmament, we are faced with heightened and renewed tensions among States, challenges to existing norms, and technological developments that provide both opportunities and risks. Addressing these challenges through building on existing norms and the development of new disarmament measures should be the key focus of the 2019 session.

In recognition of the need to make progress, last year the Netherlands advocated for more flexibility by pursuing an incremental and pragmatic approach to move forward in the CD. Progress that was achieved during the 2018 session through the work of the subsidiary bodies, and the adoption by consensus of four subsidiary body reports.

We view the work and outcomes of the subsidiary bodies as a step forward. This was widely recognized during last year's First Committee sessions by both delegations outside and inside the CD. Therefore, the Netherlands is of the view that we should build upon these outcomes to continue our substantive work towards the commencement of negotiations. While acknowledging the different views and visions of States on disarmament and security issues, let us focus on finding commonalities and focus on what is realistically possible in the 2019 session.

Mr. President,

We are flexible on the format to continue our work on substance, and how we organise our work in this regard. I will take this opportunity to share some thoughts on the programme of work.

For two decades, the CD has tried to adopt a so-called 'comprehensive and balanced' programme of work, without making any headway. As noted by my delegation last year, while we do not object to such a programme of work, the

perfect may have become the enemy of the good. Instead, the CD should take a pragmatic approach to the programme of work. In line with rule 28 of the rules of procedure, the programme of work should be a simple and technical document that includes a schedule of activities for the session ahead.

The CD took such an approach in the 1980's and 1990's, with the Chemical Weapons Convention and Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty as concrete results. In this period, the CD's programme of work was merely a schedule of activities, which outlined when the different agenda items were under consideration. This was supplemented with separate stand-alone decisions on the establishment and mandate of so-called *ad hoc* groups, in which the actual negotiations took place. By separating the decision on the establishment and mandate of subsidiary organs, from the programme of work, the CD could continue to conduct the necessary substantive and technical work, which are needed to reach agreement on the commencement of negotiations.

When taking such a pragmatic approach, the programme of work will serve as a scheduling tool, rather than a barrier for the commencement substantive work. It will allow us to continue our work on substance, with a view of reaching agreement on the start of long overdue negotiations.

One could even argue that the establishment of subsidiary bodies last year, including a schedule of activities, on all the core items of the CD, was essentially a 'comprehensive & balanced' programme of work.

Mr. President,

Only by continuing our collective efforts towards the negotiation of disarmament measures, which can take the form of norms, principles, guidelines, code of conducts, or legally binding treaties, can the CD remain relevant and credible.

In closing, I will therefore briefly touch upon our national priorities concerning the topics on our agenda. The commencement of negotiations on a Treaty Banning the Production of Fissile Material for Nuclear Weapons and other explosive devices remains our top priority. The Netherlands played an active role both in the Group of Governmental Experts in 2014 and 2015, and as co-sponsor of the High-level FMCT expert preparatory group that completed its work last year. The consensual reports of these two groups, in combination with the report of subsidiary body 2 of last year, provide us with the impetus to move this issue forward without delay.

In similar vein, we would like the CD move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and deal with today's and tomorrow's technological developments. Therefore, we see merit in further exploring how to global governance structures can deal with the challenges posed by current and future technological challenges. Keeping the CD on par with technological developments outside the Council Chamber is fundamental for its continued relevance.

Thank you Mr. President.