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Conference on Disarmament

Statement by Canada

Delivered by H.E. Leslie E. Norton
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and to
the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, 21 January 2020

Conférence du désarmement

Déclaration du Canada

Prononcée par S.E. Leslie E. Norton
Ambassadrice et Représentante permanente du Canada auprès des Nations Unies
et de la Conférence du désarmement
Genève, le 21 janvier 2020

Mr. President,

I wish to congratulate you and your five successors for taking on the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in 2020. I assure you of my delegation's full support for all your efforts.

We applaud the initiative taken by this year's presidents to work together in devising a shared approach to the 2020 session. It is a seemingly simple step, but it is an important innovation, which should improve the chances for advancing key disarmament issues in the Conference this year. Canada hopes that the 2021 presidents, of which we are one, will be able to draw on this positive precedent, in our turn, for the betterment of the CD.

The 2019 CD session demonstrated that delegations continue to struggle with what is possible to achieve in this forum; program of work proposals and even a proposal to create subsidiary bodies failed to achieve consensus. Of course, this deadlock is not unique to 2019, but has been an on-going problem for more than 20 years. This is unfortunate, as Canada continues to believe that negotiations in the CD on a treaty to end fissile material production is a timely, well-developed, and widely-supported measure both among CD members and globally.

As commencing negotiations on any agenda item may again be impossible this year, Canada supports an organized discussion in the CD touching on all of the agenda items, to begin no later than week 3 and running the bulk of the 2020 session. This organized discussion would leave time at the end of the session to determine if some agenda items would merit closer examination in 2021. The 2021 presidents could then caucus and propose means for accomplishing this work. To assist delegations in their preparations for discussions this year, we suggest that a schedule be agreed under your Presidency outlining the order in which the agenda items will be discussed, and the dates for each discussion. Naturally, if consensus to start negotiations on any agenda item emerges, we would prioritize such negotiations over general discussions. Presumably, we will learn in the next few weeks if there is consensus to start negotiations.

Between the end of last year's session and today, Canada has reflected on the dilemma of the CD's inability to proceed to negotiations. To that end, and recognizing that other delegations have made similar proposals in the past, we wonder if CD members could agree on expanding our shared concept of what might constitute "success in the CD". That is, while negotiation of legally-binding mechanisms should remain our goal, we believe that the CD could contribute to international peace and security by achieving consensus on other measures, such as norms or codes of conduct, related to specific agenda items.

Similarly, we note that CD members have focused in the past on achieving comprehensive agreements, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Given the deadlock in the CD, we wonder if we could all agree to take more modest but immediate steps on some of the agenda items, which could help to build the foundation for more comprehensive agreements down the road. For instance, we are currently at an impasse regarding a treaty preventing an arms race in outer space. However, we believe that there is scope for embarking on discussions on specific measures, such as negotiating a potential end to ASAT tests causing space debris. While this would be a

more limited achievement, such an agreement would nonetheless benefit all States and could facilitate other PAROS-related advances in the longer term.

Canada puts forward these ideas as food for thought. We are happy to pursue them with other interested delegations, or to consider proposals from other delegations or this year's presidents. We hope that we can come to consensus on measures which will give a renewed purpose and energy to the CD.

Mr. President,

Canada remains an advocate for greater diversity and inclusion in the field of disarmament. This includes more balanced participation of men and women in the Conference, including in the choice of speakers and panellists. It is important that all persons have a voice in the CD in order to help move us forward to a more peaceful and secure world.

Thank you.