



Kingdom of the Netherlands

**Statement of the Netherlands**

**delivered by**

**H.E. Robbert Gabriëlse, Permanent Representative to the  
Conference on Disarmament**

**at**

**the Conference on Disarmament**

**during**

**the plenary meeting on the impact Covid-19 on disarmament**

**Geneva, 30 June 2020**

Mr President,

Let me start by congratulating you on the assumption of your presidency during these challenging times. You can count on my delegation's full support. Let me also welcome the new colleagues in our midst from Argentina, South Korea and Tunisia.

In addition to the EU statement delivered by Croatia, the Netherlands would like to make some remarks in its national capacity.

The fact that we are meeting today, we owe to you, Mr President, the P6 as a whole, whose cooperation this year in the Conference on Disarmament has been exemplary, the Secretariat, and of course the host country Switzerland.

We are going through challenging times in terms of global health and the subsequent economic fall-out of the Covid-19 crisis. Also, national and geopolitical tensions are rising. International and multilateral cooperation is key in addressing these challenges effectively. Therefore, it is more than ever necessary that we, who are working on multilateral security issues, get 'back to work' as fully as possible. If we want to address these challenges, we need to find ways to cooperate. This is by listening to each other's point of view, understanding each other's security concerns and finding mutually acceptable ways forward.

Stopping communication channels and this dialogue can lead to misunderstanding. Furthermore, the silence we have seen is filled with a so-called 'infodemic', which exacerbates the current tensions. So, it is high time to get the multilateral disarmament machinery rolling again.

Of course this needs to be done responsibly, taking into account the hygiene and physical distancing measures our host country, together with UNOG, prescribes. We also need to find new, creative ways to conduct multilateral cooperation as restrictions on meetings will remain in place for a while. Of course, provided that the basic multilateral principles of inclusivity and multilingualism are adequately taken care of. The 'new normal' will likely not be the same as the 'old normal'. In these uncertain circumstances, rather than putting everything on hold or trying to postpone our work, we need to find creative ways to do our work in the best possible way. We cannot afford to stop working on implementing the current multilateral disarmament instruments we signed-up to when developments continue on the ground and

in space alike. Anti-personnel mines are still laid, every day, by amongst others, non-state actors, and people continue to fall victim to them. We need to continue our transparency- and confidence building measures in the field of biosecurity/safety, in order not to be confronted with a biological weapon one day. We need to ensure the Non-Proliferation Treaty continues to be implemented and is upheld, especially when some of the core agreements in the nuclear field are placed under ever-increasing pressure. We need to ensure that arms trade continues to be done responsibly and prevent diversion of small arms and light weapons. The international frameworks and instruments that underpin these actions, need to be monitored, reviewed and updated, even in an altered and adapted way compared to what we are used to. The disarmament community in Geneva has a role to play and so does the Conference on Disarmament.

The Netherlands welcomes continuing our programme in the Conference on Disarmament as was proposed before the lockdown on the basis of the agenda items. We support discussions on nuclear risk reduction, nuclear disarmament verification, and of course on banning fissile materials for nuclear weapons. We also support the idea of sharing and discussing national policies on outer space, as a first and imminent transparency and confidence-building measure and in order to further advance agenda item 3 on PAROS. We are keen to have further discussions on new weapons technologies and systems, as technical developments in this field are moving on and need to be addressed. We also support a discussion on the effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament, as our 'Back to Basics' working paper of last year has shown. We had a fruitful discussion then under the Vietnamese presidency and we are keen to continue and deepen that discussion. In that light, we fully support the proposal by the former Australian presidency to make the Rules of Procedure gender neutral. With a current female Secretary-General of the CD and several female presidents so far, it is high time that we no longer refer to these jobholders as 'he' or 'him'. It is archaic. This simple language fix, as is proposed, is long overdue and should not need to merit a complicated discussion.

In conclusion, we are pleased to see the CD back in meeting and we look forward to moving up the gears in the different disarmament forums as the improvement of the pandemic situation allows.

Thank you, Mr President.