Statement of the Netherlands

delivered by

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Conference on Disarmament

at the

the Conference on Disarmament

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Thank you Mr. President for giving me the floor.

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you on the assumption of the presidency. You can count on the full support of my delegation.

The Netherlands is keen for the work of this Conference to continue, also during these challenging times and welcomes our meeting today. In my intervention, I will focus on two points. First, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly reflect on the past sessions and provide some thoughts on how the Conference may begin its work next year. Second, my delegation would like to address the financial situation of the Conference.

Mr President,

2020 is unmistakably a memorable year for all of us. But separate from the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which still influences our work, there are a number of developments in the CD that we should reflect upon and learn from with a view to moving forward in 2021. The Netherlands warmly welcomes the close cooperation between the P6+2, which has provided the CD with the much needed continuity and consistency. This close cooperation and coordination among the Presidents should continue in 2021. Therefore, we note with appreciation that fact that there already has been a first P6 meeting of the 2021 Presidents.

Turning to the organization of our work this year. The Netherlands deeply regrets that it was not possible to agree on a framework for the planning of our substantive work. Disagreements on one part of the package prevented us from making any progress on substance during this session. This is particularly regretful as many delegations expressed their willingness from the outset of the session to start substantive work as soon as possible.

Reflecting on why we could not agree on the organization of our work, we believe that there are a number of issues from this session that we can learn from. In this context, we would like to recall our “back to basics” working paper contained in CD/2165, which continues to be of relevance. Many of the key problems identified in our working paper, unfortunately reoccurred during our session this year.

Once again disagreement on the establishment of subsidiary bodies and their respective mandates prevented substantive work on any of the agenda items, as no framework for the organization of work was agreed, due to the linkage made between the programme of work
and the establishment of subsidiary bodies. Moreover, the first 8 weeks of our session were spent on procedural debates, rather than on the substance of the Conference on Disarmaments’ agenda. Preventing us from doing substantive work and making much needed progress.

In our working paper, we provide a number of suggestions in order to deal with these problems. For example, we have argued that the organization of work can be rationalised by separating the programme of work from the establishment of subsidiary bodies. In line with the existing rules of procedure, the programme of work should merely include a schedule of activities based on the agenda that was agreed at the start of the session. By taking this approach, the focus of the plenary meetings will again be on the substance of the CD’s agenda.

Once sufficient progress is made on an agenda item or a specific topic covered by it, the Conference could subsequently establish a subsidiary body on that agenda item or topic through a stand-alone decision, in which the mandate of the subsidiary body is agreed. Substantive work on the other agenda items will continue under the programme of work as earlier agreed. This will allow the CD to make headway where possible in a pace that is commensurate to the maturity of the topic at hand. This is how the CD organized its work in the 1980s and 1990s; with success.

Hence, after more than two-decades of stalemate, resulting from an all or nothing approach, it is time to go ‘back to basics’ and to shift gears in 2021.

Mr President,

Secondly, I wish to touch upon the financial situation of the CD. We take note of the information paper dated 23 July, which raises a number of questions with my delegation. The Netherlands is particularly concerned with the lack of transparency surrounding the costs of and allocation funds for CD plenary meetings. We understand from the letter that the limits put on the number of meetings we can have in the CD this year, despite many meetings being cancelled due to the unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic, are due to a scarcity of resources at the overall level of the budget of the UN. Also, extra costs accrued by having to use Interprefy to allow remote participation due to Covid-19 pandemic, have put pressure on the total budget available.
However, we would appreciate more detail from the UN Secretariat on how much was spent for the CD on Interprefy and how priorities are set with regard to the allocation of the conference management budget by UNOG vis-à-vis the different bodies it services. We also wonder why the Member States are informed so late in the year about the scarcity of resources, when no mitigation can be sought or choices can be made or internal discussions can be held with our Fifth Committee colleagues. It looks like we are presented with a *fait accompli* and we would like to stress that it is the Member States who decide how often we conduct our meetings. In case of financial limitations we have to be informed in time and then decide on the emerging situation. Lastly, we would like to underline that there can be no hierarchy with respect to different fora in Geneva. We hope that the UN Secretariat would be in a position to give further clarification and transparency with a view to avoiding this situation in 2021.

Thank you Mr President.