

**Ambassador Wood's Remarks to the**  
**Conference on Disarmament Plenary on CD/2197**  
**Tuesday, August 10, 2021**

Thank you, Madame President.

Thank you for convening this incredibly important plenary and thank you to Australia for compiling this paper. Prior to last week, I would have said that today's session had the potential to be the most productive discussion we have had in years. After the debacle at the previous plenary, I can now honestly say it is also the most important discussion we could possibly have at this juncture of the CD.

Australia's paper covers the gamut of issues – and there are a few things that stand out to me and my delegation.

On the question of the priorities and role of the CD – For the most part, the paper captures what we would expect on the core agenda items. We have heard the same range of views in our thematic debates this year.

I was, however, interested by the notion that the CD agenda could benefit from a shake-up – that it does not reflect contemporary or emerging threats, including biological and cyber threats.

Maybe making a change to the CD core agenda items is a good idea. Maybe it's not. Candidly, it is not something that the United States has debated internally for some time.

That said, if there are ideas out there about how to make the CD agenda more relevant, more in keeping with the world we live in and the threats we see coming down the road, then the United States wants to hear those ideas. We want to have that discussion.

We are also interested in discussing the ideas put forward in the paper regarding how to do the groundwork that would be necessary for us to even consider starting negotiations – on any topic.

And therein lies the crux of the problem – and the reason this paper and this debate are so important.

There is no way for us to have these discussions, or any of the hard substantive discussions that we need to have, unless we seriously consider the other two pieces of Australia's paper: How do we break the deadlock over a Program of Work, and how can we be more effective?

On the Program of Work, this paper neatly forecasts the first 10 weeks of the 2021 session. We, as a body, do not agree on whether or not the Program of Work has to include a negotiation mandate.

I understand that many strongly believe that the Program of Work has to include at least a reference to our negotiation mandate. That to do otherwise risks the CD going even further astray.

For our part, the United States believes that the Program of Work should set the course for the year – whatever that course may be – much as Algeria’s proposal last year and Belgium’s proposal this year would have done.

So, we are in a Catch-22. We may need to discuss what the Program of Work needs to be. But having that discussion means that we have to talk about something that isn’t the negotiation of a core agenda item, which is the very issue that prevents us from adopting a Program of Work.

I also want to note that, according to the paper, a number of delegations think that P5 leadership is instrumental to breaking this deadlock.

Again, I understand, and even agree with, that sentiment.

However, I need to point out that during the debates on the Program of Work this year, there was at least one version that the entire P5 could agree to. It wasn’t enough.

Which leads me to what I believe is the lynchpin of what Australia asked and what we should be seriously discussing - How can we make the CD more effective?

The ideas presented in this paper range from the broad – and difficult – question of how to de-politicize the CD to the very specific – and seemingly easy – request that CD document names should note the year in which they were produced, that is rather than CD/1299, it would read CD/1299-95, or something along those lines.

The United States is open to considering all of these questions.

We also think we need to look at the question of membership. Rule 2 of the Rules of Procedure states that “[t]he membership of the Conference will be reviewed at regular intervals.” “Regular intervals” is not defined, but I believe we last reviewed CD membership in 1999 – and that does not seem “regular” to the United States. I also note that there are at least 25 pending membership requests.

I want to make it clear that the United States is not taking a position on whether or not we should expand the membership. We are simply stating that we, as a body, need to review the requests. And we should probably consider how frequently the CD should review its membership so that it is done at regular intervals.

The question of membership could include not only addressing enlargement of the CD, but also looking at a reduction in membership as well.

In a similar vein, the United States believes it is time to review how we manage the Presidency of the CD. We have done so before. In 1994, we amended Rule 12 to pass the Presidency on to the next year's President at the time the final report is adopted.

Is four weeks per Presidency the optimal timeframe, or should we consider changing it?

Are there lessons learned from the last two years of working in the P6+2 format that we should consider incorporating into the rules of procedure?

Should we consider adopting criteria for holding the Presidency of the CD? I know that's a very politically sensitive question – but we should be able to discuss it.

Madame President, I don't have the answers to the questions posed in the paper or to the ones I posed today.

However, I can categorically state that if our job, as the CD, is to negotiate international arms control and disarmament instruments, then it is also our job to keep this body running. We have to be the Chief Operating Officer as well as the negotiating team.

We cannot do that – I repeat, we cannot do that – unless we talk about and make decisions about the actual functioning of the CD. We also need to be willing to make changes when they make sense.

I referenced last week's so-called debate at the beginning of my remarks. The notion that there is no systemic discrimination associated with the current Rules of Procedure a prime example of the alternate universe some delegations insist on trapping the CD in.

Can anyone in this room honestly say that refusing to discuss these issues is getting us any closer to actually starting the negotiations so many have proposed?

I believe the answer is clear.

I believe that a number of delegations are well aware of the fact that refusing to talk about anything other than the core mandate is actually pushing us further away from negotiations – and that they are just fine with that fact.

Thank you, Madame President.