THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

Geneva, 22 January 2013

Delivered by Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev,
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG)

I am pleased to send greetings to the 2013 Session of the Conference on Disarmament. As in previous years, your last Session failed to produce a programme of work. It is essential to end this continued stalemate to avoid jeopardizing the credibility of the Conference and the machinery of disarmament.

The only effective arena for strengthening the rule of law in global disarmament is a single multilateral negotiating forum. I remain committed to the Conference on Disarmament, but it must fulfil its role.

The world today remains over-armed. Peace is under-funded. We cannot afford to lose yet another year. The items on your agenda, which focus mainly on weapons of mass destruction, transcend the narrow national interests of any one State and have significant implications for international peace and security. I urge you to revive substantive negotiations without delay. As I stated last week in Monterey, the sequence of your work is for you to decide. But it is time for you to resume your primary task of negotiating multilateral disarmament treaties.

My distinguished predecessor, Dag Hammarskjöld, spoke presciently of disarmament in 1960. “In this field, as we well know, a standstill does not exist; if you do not go forward, you go backward.” Let us take heed of these wise words.

I urge you to build on some of the positive developments of recent years, in particular the successful 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference and the strong global support for its consensus Action Plan. I also strongly encourage the Conference to engage more closely with civil society, where there is strong support for nuclear disarmament.

Last year, the 67th Session of the General Assembly agreed to establish an open-ended working group to examine ways of “Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations”. It also established a group of governmental experts that will begin work in 2014 to make recommendations that could contribute to an eventual fissile material cut-off treaty. Although these processes will take place outside the Conference on Disarmament, they constitute a new impetus that I hope will facilitate your agreement on a viable programme of work. We need flexibility and a spirit of compromise.
The Conference on Disarmament is central to disarmament negotiations. Let us ensure it lives up to its responsibility.

I wish you successful deliberations.