

Revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament

Canadian statement to the Conference on Disarmament

14 June 2012
Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. President,

Today's meeting is timely at a point where we again face obstacles to enabling the CD to fulfill the role it should be allowed to perform – as a forum for negotiation. The CD has not been fulfilling its mandate.

The vast majority of the states in this room have the political will to resume substantive work. We demonstrated readiness to find solutions and open the door to real progress, in our support for the Program of Work proposed by the Egyptian President. This same political will to advance also exists in the UN General Assembly which adopted resolution (66/66) on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

Canada acknowledges that there are no magic solutions. But, simply lamenting the continuing deadlock is not the answer.

Mr. President,

One avenue that merits our attention is procedural reform. When they mandated the CD in the 1960s, the authors of the first Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD I) were living and working during the Cold War. While the global political context has changed drastically, the procedures of the CD have not evolved. Addressing procedural issues alone will not solve all the problems of the CD, but may allow us to restore an institution better suited to meet today's needs and better able to build the trust and political will necessary to advance our collective interest in a safer and more secure world. We believe the time has passed to modernize the CD and its rules.

Canada supports the proposal by Secretary General Tokayev for a Special Coordinator to be appointed to examine the rules of procedure. This Special Coordinator would be charged with examining past and current practice in implementing the rules of procedure to determine if member states could make changes to facilitate the resumption of substantive work. The Coordinator could also examine the need and scope for a full review of the rules of procedure.

One issue the Coordinator should examine is the rule of consensus. Use of the consensus rule in the CD has increasingly drifted far away from its original intent, to protect a state's national security interests. If we continue to apply consensus not only to substantive but also procedural issues, this body will never operate effectively.

The Coordinator should also examine past and current practice in agreeing to a Program of Work. The Program of Work is meant to support the substantive work of the Conference. Yet it is now used by some as a tool to prevent all meaningful work. We should not forget, Mr. President that nothing in the rules of procedure precludes the CD from working in the absence of an agreed Program of Work. Indeed, the CD has shown its ability to function without one. Why, Mr. President have we self-imposed this additional burden? If we cannot return to the original intent of the rules of procedure, perhaps it is time to review the need for an annual Program of Work. A rolling Program of Work, reviewed regularly, might better serve our purposes.

We agree with Secretary General Tokayev that the rotating Presidency limits our potential for in depth work, as one month does not provide sufficient time for a President to conduct the necessary consultation, build the right bridges and provide direction to the CD. We should consider if lengthening the Presidency or changing how the President is chosen would benefit the CD. Beyond the length of a Presidency, one must consider the position holder. Canada believes that the credibility of this organization is damaged when the Presidency is assumed by those found by the UN Security Council to be in non-compliance with their non-proliferation obligations.

Mr. President,

Institutions are not set in stone. They should adapt to meet modern realities. The CD has not done so. If we are not able to resolve the substantive issues that hold us back, a serious look at procedural hindrances that contribute to the deadlock is merited.