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As you are aware, the 1997 session of the Conference on Disarmament will come to an end with the Presidency of Sri Lanka. This being the situation, the CD has to take stock of the work it has done during the course of its deliberations in 1997 and prepare its report to the 52nd session of the UNGA which is due to begin approximately a month from now.

Prior to my assumption of responsibilities of the Presidency, several colleagues of mine inquired from me what plans I have, to conduct the work of the Conference during my tenure. Having sat through the formal and informal meetings of the CD during the current session and noting the progress of our work, or, to be precise, the lack of it, and the remaining time available to the CD, it was not difficult for me to respond to that question. According to the Rule 44 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference, it should begin consideration of its draft report to the General Assembly of the United Nations at least two weeks before the end of the session. This gives the Conference not more than one week to consider the substantive issues before it. We, therefore, simply do not have time to cover fresh ground.

Delegations are perfectly aware how the Conference proceeded during the first two parts of the current session. During this period, some delegations made repeated attempts to begin our work seriously and earnestly. In this process a number of documents were submitted to the CD by those delegations, both individually and collectively. Although the Conference was unable to resolve the problems it encountered in the process, these contributions remain as sentinels to remind the attempts made by us to overcome the difficulties we have encountered. They will also serve as institutional memory of the CD to guide our way in the years to come. Consequently, we should not be discouraged thinking that we have wasted one whole year of the time allotted to the C.D.

Looking at the situation the Conference is facing today; we have to be mindful of several aspects. The **first** and foremost is the fact that the CD is the sole multilateral negotiating body responsible for disarmament matters. Speaking of our

negotiating mandate, Sir Michael Weston, the former Ambassador of the UK in his farewell statement reminded us of the fact that negotiation can begin only when the climate is propitious for such an endeavor. If there is no meeting of minds representing the entirety of the CD membership, there is no prospect for negotiation on any issue, whether they fall into the category of nuclear disarmament, conventional arms or any other specific area of interest. However, we must accept the fact that negotiation cannot begin in a vacuum. Prior to serious negotiations, identification of subjects should take place. That should be followed by a process of consultation ending up with agreement on the parameters of negotiation to be conducted. Past experience has taught us that even after going through this process, negotiation may not take place until such time there is a consensus to commence negotiation.

Another related factor is that the CD is not an institution that can conduct negotiations continuously year after year, and produce international instruments as if they are coming out of an automated factory. The long duration of time taken by the CD to agree to start negotiations on the CWC and the CTBT, is an example how time consuming such decisions can be.

However, the CD cannot and must not wait motionless for situations to evolve on its own. The Conference can be pro-active and prepare itself for future negotiations by undertaking consultations and preparing ground for such work. For example, while negotiations were underway on a CTBT, consultations were carried out by Ambassador Shannon of Canada with a view to reaching agreement on a FMCT. I have referred to this particular instance only as an example how consultations on issues considered important by the Conference were carried out, while serious negotiations were also being conducted on a CTBT. It is my sincere hope that the CD will proceed in this manner when it begins its 1998 session.

The **second aspect** is the method of our decision making. In keeping with the Rules of Procedure of the CD, all substantive decisions are taken by consensus. There are critics of this process. However, taking into consideration the nature of our work, it has to be admitted that decisions through another process would be difficult. That

being the case, delegations have to accept the fact that without a consensus, no important decision can be taken by the CD. In view of this reality, delegations cannot afford to be over ambitious or attempt to force decisions on the Conference and expect such moves to succeed. How should we then proceed? In my opinion, the Conference should be ready to conduct negotiations when such a move is feasible. Meanwhile, consultations should continue on other subjects with a view to bringing them to maturity, or, in other words, to a stage where negotiations will be possible.

The **third point** is the autonomous character of the Conference. This has led some delegations to maintain that CD is the master of its house. However, on certain occasions, the CD seems to have accepted the fact that it should heed to the calls made by the international community. CTBT was such an example. There is a reason for this position. For, every delegation represented in the Conference, roughly speaking, there are two other delegations, out there. The CD is neither self-funded, nor it is conducting business for its own exclusive use. It is the international community as a whole, which is the eventual beneficiary of our deliberations. It is the international community, whom we expect to support our endeavors and accept the final products that come out of this body in the form of international instruments. We should, therefore, not consider ourselves as a totally independent entity. Instead, we have to conduct ourselves as master craftsmen entrusted with a specific function by the international community. In the circumstances, while we make attempts to project our national views and protect our national interests, we have also to be mindful of the responsibilities given to us by the international community and our obligations towards it. It is against this background we should ask ourselves, whether we have discharged the responsibilities reposed on us diligently? In 1998, are we going to conduct our business in the same manner as was done in 1997? I hope "no" will be the answer.

The Conference has exhausted one whole year attempting to decide on the programme of work for 1997. Even after reaching an agreement on the agenda, we have failed to reach any decision on the specific item or items that can be taken up for negotiation by the Conference. In the circumstances, it is rather disheartening to hear

during the informal consultations on Tuesday 19th, delegations repeating their often stated positions without due regard to the existing situation in the CD.

The answer to our problem cannot be found by dividing the agenda into two or three broad areas such as nuclear disarmament, conventional disarmament, etc. and consigning all subjects into two or three separate baskets. As the delegations are well aware, despite its shortcomings, we have adopted an agenda. Our problem was more related to the work programme, or to be precise, our inability to treat separately items that are ripe for negotiation and those other items which require further consultation. The problem lies in our inability to appreciate the preoccupations of each other and the failure to be accommodative to the extent possible, in the common interest of mankind.

Towards the end of the second part of our session in June, there was a ray of hope that the CD would re-establish one or more ad hoc committees and even establish another ad hoc committee. Although we were unable to lock on to that opportunity, I am optimistic that in 1998 the Conference will be able to take a quick decision on the matter and commence negotiations as early as possible. Meanwhile, consultations can be held to narrow the differences on other agenda items. If the Conference can reach such an understanding during this session, we can jointly take pride that the era of polemics and rhetoric is behind us and the CD will face the year 1998 with justifiable confidence. With that optimistic note, I would like to conclude my opening remarks.