Remarks of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to the United Nations Disarmament Commission

By

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I welcome this opportunity to address the 2014 substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, albeit at its closing plenary, as I was away on official travel at the beginning of the session.

I cannot hide the regret and disappointment at the failure of the Commission to reach agreement on final documents.

I had hoped that a growing recognition throughout the world of the magnitude of disarmament and non-proliferation stakes which have inspired calls for action in recent years would be conducive for a positive outcome of the 2012-2014 cycle of the UN Disarmament Commission.

Unfortunately, the Commission’s efforts remained unsuccessful in formulating recommendations for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, or for practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons.

Nevertheless, I cannot overstate my appreciation to Ambassador [Vladimir] Drobnjak for his able stewardship and constructive engagement as the Commission’s Chairman at this session. I also wish to thank the chairmen of the two Working Groups, Ambassador [Naif bin Bandar] Al-Sudairy and Mr. [Knut] Langeland for their commitment to the process of deliberations and for their efforts to come up with a list of recommendations in relation to the two agenda items respectively.

The chairs have undoubtedly promoted a constructive dialogue—which is after all one of the purposes of this deliberative body—and I wish to commend them on their commitment to the process of deliberations and for their tenacity in relentlessly pursuing their mandates. I also wish to thank the members of the Commission for their efforts to achieve a positive outcome, although in the end neither working group was able to reach consensus.

I believe that the Commission missed a good opportunity to build on the positive developments witnessed during the past year and to send a clear signal that the period of stagnation that had troubled the disarmament debate was over. Such a signal could have also spurred progress in other disarmament forums.

Instead, with no consensus on the items before the Commission, the outcome of this session, and indeed of this cycle, adds to the unsatisfactory record in recent years and the lack of outcome at the end of yet another cycle may be further testing the Commission’s credibility. We have reached a juncture here and the time has come to examine closely once again the Commission’s methods of work.

We must not allow this setback to undermine our collective efforts to advance the multilateral disarmament agenda. As we look towards the future, we know that the road ahead will be difficult. We must address the challenges ahead in a spirit of cooperation and not confrontation, led by our shared values.

I am confident that efforts will continue to be made to advance nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. I am equally confident that efforts will continue regarding practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, as the adoption of such measures will contribute toward reducing or eliminating the causes for mistrust, fear, tensions, and hostilities.
As the Deputy Secretary-General stated at the beginning of this session, “It is still possible for 2014 to be a year for the diplomatic bridge-builders and fire-fighters of this world to carry the day.”

These are precisely the skills that will be most needed next week as the States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty assemble for this year’s session of the Preparatory Committee for the treaty’s 2015 Review Conference. There are plenty of shared interests and ideals in this chamber today. Let us build bridges where we can, and fight fires when we must. Let us never give up the search for ways to move the disarmament agenda forward.