Message by Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Secretary-General’s Personal Representative to the Conference

Lunchtime Seminar
“Exploring Avenues to address the Stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament”

Palais des Nations, Room VIII
Wednesday, 15 May 2013 at 13:15

Delivered on his behalf by Mr. Jarmo Sareva, Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Director, United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Geneva Branch.
It gives me great pleasure to extend my greeting to this timely and important meeting. I am grateful to Ambassador Wibowo, in his current role as President of the Conference on Disarmament, for the initiative. I am grateful also to the co-organizer UNIDIR for once again providing the Geneva disarmament community with their unique expertise and convening power.

The prolonged stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament is a cause for deep concern for the entire international community. The Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, considers the impasse unacceptable and has repeatedly called upon the Conference to resume substantive work. Today, I reiterate that call.

The CD has been prevented from starting new negotiations towards disarmament treaties and strengthening the rule of law in this area since 1996. This long impasse in the Conference has led to questioning of the relevance and efficiency of traditional multilateral disarmament.

In contrast, like-minded negotiating tracks such as the Ottawa and Oslo Conventions on Anti-Personnel Landmines and Cluster Munitions respectively have been an indisputable success in addressing the scourge of these two types of conventional weapons. Even if still lacking universal membership, these conventions have brought significant early benefits through stockpile destruction, clearance and the hugely valuable work on victim assistance.

Would, then, such a like-minded model be applicable to nuclear disarmament, including our collective efforts to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons?

I firmly believe, like most of you do, that a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) would be an essential next step in realizing our common vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. I also believe that an eventual treaty should curb both vertical and horizontal proliferation, just as the CTBT has done. However, it is clear that to be effective, an FMCT would have to include all States with the relevant capability. An FMCT among the non-nuclear like-minded alone would run the risk of failing to reach its broader objectives.

Negotiations towards an FMCT should therefore include the presence and participation of all nuclear or nuclear-capable States. The CD already brings together all such countries.
I have frequently stressed that the Conference on Disarmament is one of those multilateral organs which, if it did not exist, would have to be established. I also believe that if we had the luxury of going back to the drawing board, we would probably end up with a somewhat different set of *modus operandi* for the Conference. But this is a luxury that we do not have.

Nevertheless, despite our collective frustration over the lack of progress, we must continue to pursue genuinely multilateral solutions, including among the non-like-minded. This is where we put multilateralism to the test. And the CD is the one instrument we currently have for that pursuit. If we allow it to be torn down, we will only create an even greater void, with very limited opportunities to put in its place a meaningful mechanism.

But this is not a licence for complacency. On the contrary, it is an obligation to show greater flexibility, courage and leadership to pursue legitimate national security interests through multilateral means. We have a collective responsibility to enable the Conference on Disarmament to regain its essential role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Here, I also renew the call I made last year for the Conference to examine critically its working methods, membership and agenda. As the title of this seminar suggests, we must explore all avenues for progress.

Finally, I also express the hope that the Open-ended Working Group on Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations, as well as the Group of Governmental Experts on an FMCT will both help create a new momentum in the CD on these important issues.

We must all work to raise awareness of the importance of the CD and generate momentum for practical progress – we cannot simply sit and wait for political will to appear.

I wish you a most productive seminar.