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Statement by
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Thematic Discussion on the
"Disarmament Machinery"
First Committee

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Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Portugal fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union on the “Disarmament Machinery” thematic discussions.

However, allow me to add specific remarks regarding a specific issue of particular relevance to my country.

Mr. Chairman,

Portugal strongly believes that a non-discriminatory, fully-inclusive and multilateral approach remain essential in addressing globally-shared concerns related to disarmament, arms controls and non-proliferation.

This Assembly, by adopting resolutions A/RES/66/59, A/RES/67/72, A/RES/68/64, just to name a few, reiterated in a clear manner that fully inclusive multilateral negotiations mechanisms constitute in itself a major pre-requisite for effective and universal progresses for achieving long and sustained peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

We remain deeply concerned with the fact that those unquestionable principles continue, year after year, not being respected, neither implemented, in the framework of an essential part of the UN Disarmament Machinery, the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament (CD).

During the past 15 years, the Conference on Disarmament - the single UN negotiating forum - has not produced any decision regarding its enlargement to the States who legitimately require membership, which should be mandatory in accordance with its own rules of procedure.

Year after year, this Committee reaches consensus in expressing its dissatisfaction regarding this anomalous and unacceptable situation, through the adoption of the annual Resolution on the Report of the CD. However, also year after year, the legitimate aspiration of UN Members to become State-Parties to the Conference continues to be, in practical terms, frustrated.

Mr. Chairman,

It’s not acceptable any kind of divisive perception of States in addressing concerns shared by all, as disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control issues are. Also, States not only must engage one with another in searching for the best possible solutions, but they also must not prevent others of contributing to the discussions of issues that matter to all.
Mr. Chairman,

The issue of the enlargement of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament has met no satisfactory solution since the Conference was established in 1979. According to Rule I.2. of its Rules of Procedure, the CD should review its membership at regular intervals. However, only twice proposals on effective enlargement achieved consensus since 1979: in 1996, when 23 countries joined the CD, and in 1999, when five other States were admitted.

Those two enlargements were preceded by wide international pressure, leading to the adoption, by the General Assembly, of consecutive resolutions that tackled this issue, including Resolution A/RES/49/77 [C], adopted in 1994; Resolution A/RES/50/72 [C], adopted in 1995, and Resolution A/RES/51/47 [A], adopted in 1996, all of them addressing solely the issue of the CD membership.

In this regard, Portugal strongly regrets that no reference was made in the latest Conference on Disarmament Report to the nomination of the Friend of the Chair for the enlargement of the CD's membership. Moreover, the Informal Group of Observer States to the CD has repeatedly asked for the appointment of a Special Rapporteur tasked to examine the enlargement modalities of the Conference, without any prejudice to the outcome. We cannot but regret the lack of ability of the CD to pursue, up to now, this request.

Mr. Chairman,

The Conference on Disarmament is in a persistent and frustrating deadlock. Portugal firmly believes that a positive decision on the enlargement of the CD's membership would help in setting a constructive new momentum to the negotiations' general environment.

Indeed, the CD is likely to be assessed more by what it cannot do or decide, rather than for its past achievements. The credibility of the CD rests on its capacity to produce decisions on all the different matters under its consideration. Despite its long-lived deadlock, the fact that a significant number of States continues to express their interest in joining the Conference is a powerful political statement on the Conference continued relevance.

Mr. Chairman,

As contained in CD' report to the 45th UNGA, (quote), "The Conference on Disarmament has a unique character and importance as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating body, and it is important that it continues to discharge its substantive responsibilities" (end of quote).

Portugal hopes that the discussions and deliberations in this First Committee's session will be fruitful, also in addressing the urgent need for enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament.

I thank you.