



**United Kingdom  
Permanent Representation  
to the  
Conference on Disarmament**

**Valedictory Address to  
the Conference on Disarmament  
by  
United Kingdom Ambassador John Dunican**

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VALEDICTORY ADDRESS TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

BY

UNITED KINGDOM AMBASSADOR JOHN DUNCAN

Mr President, Dear colleagues

Although I will not be leaving Geneva for another few weeks, due to other commitments this is the last plenary that I will be able to address you all before my departure.

It seems only yesterday that, sitting only a few yards from where I am now, I took the floor for my maiden speech, but it has been 5 years – one of the longest postings of my professional career.

In the spring of 2006 the world of arms control and disarmament looked very different and I was very conscious of the weight of history; of the number of British ambassadors who have spoken and debated within these walls stretching right back to the early part of the last century when this was the site of the ill fated League of Nations.

I was perhaps fortunate that my arrival coincided with what has proved to be a sea change – a desire by many to break out from a decade of deadlock, to shrug off the despondency that so infused the multilateral disarmament community. This sea change culminated in the successful NPT Review Conference last year with its unprecedented agreement on action across all 3 pillars – Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Peaceful uses.

The CD was very much an early part of that movement with the decision of the United States to table a framework treaty on FMCT and the subsequent proposal by the then P6 presidency of draft decision L.1 that in turn led, for the first time in many years, to a period of intense activity in Geneva as the CD engaged across all items on its agenda.

Indeed such was the rapid upsurge in work that many delegations in Geneva found it difficult to cover the spread of work, having suffered from the corrosive effects of gradual yet understandable downsizing during the previous decade.

The energy behind this renaissance found its expression in a number of fields as a wide number of countries decided that the deadlock and stagnation should not be allowed to continue in this important area of policy. It was particularly evident in the area of conventional weapons. Over the succeeding months we witnessed the launch of the Oslo Treaty negotiations, outside the traditional multilateral framework and the launch of the Arms Trade Treaty process under a UN General Assembly mandate.

In both those cases we witnessed a willingness to embrace a new type of diplomacy; not I hasten to add the digital diplomacy of blogging, FaceBook and Twitter (important though those new tools are to modern diplomacy) But the diplomacy of cross-regional coalitions; a deliberate break from the diplomacy of power politics towards a diplomacy based on shared interests and values.

The election of President Obama in the United States heralded significant movement on the strategic nuclear agenda too, with the commencement here in Geneva of negotiations between Russia and America on New START.

But as the wider multilateral diplomatic community geared itself up and got back to work, the CD appeared to hesitate and then to falter. The brokering of the decision CD 1864 under the Algerian Presidency seemed to herald a new era for the CD. But this was not to be.

Like many others in this room I have wider responsibilities, but it is nevertheless a disappointment that in the area that should have been the core of my work over the past 5 years we have not seen the kind of progress that so many expected and hoped for.

In some ways this is surprising since the CD community does not lack the talent, energy or willingness to embrace new ways of working that have been the precursors to success in other areas of the multilateral diplomatic community.

Indeed it has been a great privilege to serve alongside such a talented group of diplomats. I will spare the blushes of those present who know the esteem in which I hold them, but an indicator of the quality of this community can be seen in the postings to which a number of our colleagues have, over the past 5 years, been sent on completion of their own time in Geneva – Washington, Moscow or Kabul to name but a few, are places to which our diplomatic services send their most capable officers.

I have also been constantly impressed by the energy and ingenuity of my colleagues as they sought to find ways out of the impasse. The willingness to work together in that cross-regional coalition that the CD P6 joint presidency represents, was an inspiration during our own Presidency in 2008.

And yet despite the urging, indeed blandishments, of many senior political figures on the international scene, from both the past and the present UN Secretary Generals, and the High Level Meeting in New York, we have been unable to move forward.

Many have speculated about why the CD seems unable to play its part in the new dynamic in multilateral diplomacy; an increasing number have drawn the conclusion that the CD is no longer "Fit for purpose".

My own view is that while there may be some truth in the argument that the institution itself needs some modernisation, the problem is more profound.

Certainly no matter how effective the P6 mechanism has shown itself in improving cross-regional agreement, there can be little doubt that the concept of a presidency that lasts for a matter of weeks is absurdly labour intensive for any nation compared to the results that could possibly be achieved in such a timescale. If we were starting from a blank page I doubt that anyone would suggest such an idea unless their objective was to ensure that the CD did not make progress.

There is also something rather worrying about an institution whose membership proudly proclaimed for much of my time here that it was "The only multilateral negotiating body" when that was self evidently not the case, or that talks about the membership of the institution being ideally suited to

disarmament when so many UNGA members are kept outside. I also tend to flinch when I hear reference to the "Geneva spirit" even worse to "The best club in town".

But these are simply the symptoms of a much deeper malaise; an unwillingness to show the necessary leadership without which all the energy and skill of diplomats on the front line counts for little.

A senior military officer once described the requirements of leadership to me in the following terms:

The **Vision** to see the world as it might be

The **Courage** to take up that vision.

The **Determination** to hold fast to that vision despite the obstacles placed in one's path along the way until it becomes a reality.

To that triptych of Vision, Courage and Determination I would perhaps add, the willingness to pay the price, or to put it another way, to accept the costs that achieving that vision will entail.

In my personal view, the lesson from the past 5 years, is that once the P6 presidency put the decision L.1 on the table it has always been possible to get the CD back to work. We simply have not been willing to pay the price for so doing.

The coming months will show whether the exasperation with the current state of affairs is sufficient to bring about the change that so many have been advocating.

For my part the journey is over. I shall look back with gratitude for all that I have learned from serving with some of the finest diplomats in the business and I leave inspired that despite the huge variety of culture, political system and history that is represented in this room there is a common humanity that unites us all; a willingness to make common cause, to put aside our difference and strive to make the world a better place.

A word of thanks to the translators who have coped so well with my impromptu interventions and arguments made on the hoof.

And finally my thanks to my own team, who will remain to carry on the task. I doubt that any ambassador could have wished for greater commitment, imagination and support than that which I have enjoyed during my tenure.

Mr President, Dear Colleagues.

I bid you farewell and wish you good luck in your endeavours.

Thank you.