



Permanent Mission of Italy  
UN - Geneva

## Conference on Disarmament

### Opening Statement

**delivered by Ambassador Leonardo Bencini,  
Permanent Representative of Italy to  
the Conference on Disarmament**

*Geneva, 26 January 2023*

Mister President,

Let me congratulate you on being the first President of the 2023 session of the Conference on Disarmament. You have my Delegation's full support.

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me add some remarks in my national capacity.

Mister President,

2022 was an *annus horribilis* for international peace and security. The work we do here greatly suffered from this. In August the X NPT Review Conference failed to adopt a Final Document. In September this Conference adopted a disarmingly (yes, *that* was disarming) insubstantial report. The First Committee in New York took place in an increasingly divisive environment. When we gathered in this very room on 28 November for the opening of the IX Review Conference of the Convention on biological weapons (BWC RevCon) we were all aware that that was the last chance to save the day and the year.

And so we did. In a statement, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, welcomed the adoption of the Final Document of the IX Review Conference, that offered, and I quote, “a glimmer of hope in an overall bleak international security environment”.

I was honoured and pleased to have presided over this process. Being the President of the IX BWC RevCon was a very challenging task but one that proved to be extremely rewarding in the end. We navigated through many difficult moments and we managed to adopt a Final

Declaration by consensus with several decisions and recommendations. The Final Document sets out our roadmap for the next few years. We achieved the goal we set out at the beginning – to break the deadlock that had for too long prevented any meaningful progress in the Convention’s implementation. We now have a working group that will discuss every issue concerning this implementation, including compliance and verification, a priority for many delegations in this room.

The success of the BWC RevCon teaches some useful lessons that we could use also in this forum. The main lesson is that we have to invest in dialogue. We should not discuss more but discuss differently. The BWC RevCon has proven that meaningful dialogue among different regional groups is not only possible, it is in fact a reality – we had three intensive weeks of negotiations to testify to that.

Another lesson is that, in spite of the current international context, the multilateral system is very much alive and still the best – and in most cases the only – tool we have to deal with the challenges we are facing. And in this we must also invest, politically and financially.

Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control play a crucial role in the security landscape and so should this Conference. We have to move over the sense of frustration for the long impasse in the Conference's work. We will not make any progress if we simply use old approaches. It is here that we should create the conditions for negotiations to start, using this platform to enhance dialogue and transparency. Just as we did during the BWC RevCon.

Going back to the BWC RevCon, satisfied as we may be for its positive outcome, we regret we did not achieve what could have been a historic agreement, perhaps the most important agreement in the history of the BWC. We had an updated Solemn Declaration and an article-by-article review that took into account also the changes brought about by the pandemic. We had a decisions and recommendations part that went very much into detail on the mechanisms on international cooperation and science and technology, and we endorsed a number of proposals that clearly enjoyed consensus. One delegation prevented this historic agreement from materialising.

Mr. President,

One delegation blocked consensus at the X NPT RevCon. The same delegation prevented this Conference from adopting a meaningful report in 2022. It was the same delegation of the country that almost one year ago attacked its sovereign neighbour and waged an anachronistic and brutal war of aggression and attempted territorial conquest. This war has caused untold human suffering and global economic and financial instability. We are abhorred by the attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. This war must stop immediately and all occupied territories must be returned to Ukraine. We will continue to support the brave Ukrainian people for as long as it takes in their fight for freedom, independence and territorial integrity.

Disarmament and arms control are just another side of international peace and security. We will raise this issue every time we consider it relevant, in this forum as in any other fora, in the way we deem fit. We will reject any points of order and every abuse of the rules of procedure aimed at silencing ours and other delegations from raising issues that we have the full right to consider relevant.

Mister President,

Italy shares the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons. We were disappointed that the X Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference could not agree on a Final Document. However, we managed to reaffirm the principle that the NPT, with its three mutually reinforcing pillars, remains the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime. The consensus-minus-one draft contained several elements that my Delegation considers very important. Among them, the prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the immediate commencement in this forum of negotiations on a Treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. To this we would add that, pending its conclusion, all relevant States should abide by a moratorium.

Just over a year ago, the five nuclear-weapon states issued a joint statement which affirmed that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought”. After that statement and since 24 February we have heard all too often unacceptable nuclear rhetoric from the same country I mentioned above. It is vital that that principle be reaffirmed

and that constructive dialogue among nuclear States be resumed to avoid military confrontation, strengthen stability and predictability, and increase mutual understanding and confidence.

We also believe we should work to reinvigorate the role of the CD for nuclear disarmament as a forum to enhance and expand dialogue on strategic issues. I would like to briefly touch upon two issues which we deem particularly urgent.

The first is the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. As far as Italy is concerned, we have made strong diplomatic efforts in recent months to encourage Tehran to take the deal tabled by the JCPOA Coordinator in March and August 2022 and to return to full compliance with its JCPOA commitments. We have also urged Iran to fully and timely cooperate with the IAEA with respect to all its safeguard-related commitments in order to clarify and resolve any pending issue. At the same time, we deplore the transfer of Iranian drones to Russia supplementing Moscow's war effort.

Italy condemns the multiple ballistic missile launches by the DPRK. We are concerned about the possibility of a forthcoming nuclear test which would represent a threat to the stability of the region, as well as a further, open challenge to the resilience of the multilateral non-proliferation system. We urge the DPRK to refrain from further provocations and to take concrete steps towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization. We call on Pyongyang to engage in credible negotiations in this respect and to comply with relevant UNSC Resolutions. Italy continues to support the full implementation of the international sanctions regime.

Mister President,

To conclude, Italy believes that greater interaction of the CD with civil society could make a key contribution to our work, enriching our debate. Italy promotes policies and approaches that enable the full empowerment of women and inclusiveness in general, taking into due regard the gendered impacts of armed violence and the importance of ensuring adequate representation of women in disarmament negotiations and peacebuilding programs. One of the causes for pride of our Presidency of the IX BWC RevCon was that we had the most gender-balanced bureau – and by bureau I mean chairs of the Committees and facilitators – in the history of the Convention. I am

sure one of the reasons of the success of the Conference was also this gender-balanced, inclusive approach I aimed to give it.

This year, the Conference on Disarmament should once again take up the issue of the technical update to its Rules of Procedure. Minor linguistic/technical adjustments would be enough to adopt a gender-neutral language, at least in the English version. We urge delegations whose native language is not English to refrain from arguing at least on the English version and stopping this technical change to that version of the Rules of procedure.

Today more than ever we face the concrete risk of the marginalization of the Conference, and ultimately of its irrelevance. We need to remind ourselves of our special responsibilities and act with the same sense of urgency and the same constructive spirit we had at the BWC RevCon. If we succeeded then, we can succeed here.

I thank you, Mister President.