

REVITALISING MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT NEGOTIATIONS

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Dear First Committee Delegate:

At this years First Committee, you will for the first time, be faced with not one, but three, proposals for revitalising multilateral disarmament negotiations in the Committee on Disarmament.(CD).

These proposals are the Austria-Mexico-Norway proposal involving the setting up of working groups as a possible way forward,(A/C.1/66/L.2 [http://www. reachingcriticalwill.org/ political/1com/1com11/res/L21. pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com11/res/L21.pdf)) the proposal from Switzerland, South Africa and the Netherlands, (A/C.1/66/L.39 [http://www. reachingcriticalwill.org/ political/1com/1com11/res/L39. pdf](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/1com11/res/L39.pdf)) which exhorts governments to facilitate progress at the CD and failing that suggests a process of 'review' with no specific options being suggested other than deep thought, ('...Invites States to explore, consider and consolidate options, proposals and elements for a revitalization of the United Nations disarmament machinery as a whole, including the Conference on Disarmament;') and the Canadian FMCT resolution which as its name suggests covers only the FMCT as an area for multilateral negotiation.

There is general agreement amongst governments, we believe, that whilst progress at the CD under the current consensus modus operandi is the most desirable option, this is simply not taking place – and has not done so for a variety of reasons for the last 15 years. Absent change it is unlikely to do so.

The continuing support for the CD without change of any kind whatsoever that a number of governments are softly articulating is unhelpful.

Continued lack of progress in the CD will therefore either:
a) mean that the CD loses relevance as a negotiating forum as nothing

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can be negotiated in it, and as governments therefore seek other means to progress a multilateral disarmament agenda

or

b) mean that no progress is at all possible on a multilateral disarmament agenda (also unacceptable)

c) Will force changes in the rules of operation of the CD so that it is no longer possible for one or two countries to stymie the intentions of everybody else by an abuse of the consensus rule

d) Will force that abuse to cease. This last seems most unlikely absent a 'circuit breaker' such as the resolutions submitted by Austria, Norway and Mexico or by Switzerland, South Africa and the Netherlands. Both these resolutions seek to facilitate progress across the broad range of CD issues not merely on an FMCT as the Canadian resolution does.

While these resolutions have been submitted entirely independently, there is no reason not to vote for all three of them. They are in effect complimentary and not contradictory.

However, the Austria – Mexico – Norway resolution is by far the strongest and is the one that most clearly offers a way out of the current impasse in the CD. Even this resolution does not actually establish an automatic mechanism for moving forward – something that might serve to focus minds during the upcoming CD – but merely suggests that the GA MIGHT in the absence of progress, examine what could be done to facilitate progress and suggests the establishment of working groups as a possible way forward. There is nothing automatic about the establishment of those groups.

In that sense there is less difference between the Austria-Mexico-Norway proposal and the much vaguer and much more open Switzerland-SA-Netherlands proposal, which does NOT establish any specific mechanism for proceeding at all, but merely exhorts governments to 'explore mechanisms' to do so.

Support for the Austria – Mexico – Norway mechanism, however unreal its differences with the Switzerland – SA – Netherlands proposal, will 'put down a marker' for seriousness in pushing for progress at the CD and in multilateral disarmament negotiations generally. If we really truly want progress in multilateral disarmament negotiations this proposal AS WELL as the other two proposals warrants our support. While all three proposals should be voted for, it is the

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Austria-Mexico – Norway proposal that will determine whether there is really progress in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

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