

Top UN officials urge countries to advance global disarmament talks



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) and General Assembly President Josep Deiss at high-level disarmament meeting

24 September 2010 – Top United Nations officials today urged countries to build on recent achievements in the field of disarmament and to step up efforts to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction.

“We all believe that the multilateral disarmament machinery should deliver more, and more quickly. Only the political will of Member States can make that happen,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon **told** a high-level meeting on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

The meeting, held on the margins of the annual high-level debate of the General Assembly, also addressed how to advance multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Mr. Ban recalled recent progress on the issue, including initiatives at both multilateral and bilateral levels such as the new Treaty on the Limitation and Reduction of Strategic Offensive Arms, or START, signed by the United States and Russia.

“We have built important momentum. This is hard-won momentum and we should build on recent achievements,” he said.

“Yet much remains to be done – both on weapons of mass destruction and conventional weaponry,” he added. “The next few years are critical. We can push forward on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament or risk sliding back.”

In particular, the Secretary-General called for advancing progress within the Conference on Disarmament, which he termed “the undisputed home of international arms control efforts.”

Despite adopting its first programme of work in over a decade last year, the Geneva-based Conference – the world’s sole multilateral disarmament negotiating forum – has been unable to translate this breakthrough into substantive progress.

General Assembly President Joseph Deiss noted that for the UN to fulfil its role in disarmament and related issues, reinforcing and reinvigorating the UN disarmament machinery is essential. A vital aspect of this is to address the current deadlock faced by the Conference on Disarmament.

“Being the world’s single disarmament negotiating body, the CD should be able to overcome its current stalemate,” he told the meeting.

Noting that the body’s programme of work deals with different aspects of the disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, which should be addressed in an integrated approach, Mr. Deiss said that selectively choosing one or another item will undermine the delicate political balance achieved so far.

“It is my hope that the political support that we all lend to the Conference on Disarmament here today, as well as possible concrete proposals on its revitalization, can unfold into real steps towards the achievement of our common objective of establishing a world free of nuclear weapons,” said the President.

Highlighting some of the key elements of the meeting, Mr. Ban noted broad concern about the current status of the UN disarmament machinery, as well as broad agreement on the need to immediately start negotiations on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

There were also “constructive” discussions on how to improve the effectiveness of the disarmament machinery, including the Conference on Disarmament.

“I think the current stagnation in multilateral negotiations is understood to be due not just to a lack of political will, but also to deficiencies in the disarmament machinery,” the Secretary-General said in his closing remarks, adding that a number of speakers called for a comprehensive assessment of the functioning of the machinery, including institutional issues such as mandates, membership, agendas and rules of procedures.

Mr. Ban said he will ask his Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters to undertake a thorough review of the issues raised at today’s meeting, with a special focus on the functioning of the Conference on Disarmament.

According to a summary of the discussion, participants reiterated that the only guarantee of avoiding the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is their elimination. Several expressed concern that, should the current stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament continue, that body’s relevance would be called into question and Member States could resort to an alternate multilateral process.

Text of SG's remarks to opening of CD meeting <http://www.un.org/apps/sq/sqstats.asp?nid=4804>