



UNIDIR

WORKSHOP REPORT

Revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament

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About UNIDIR

UNIDIR is a voluntarily funded, autonomous institute within the United Nations. One of the few policy institutes worldwide focusing on disarmament, UNIDIR generates knowledge and promotes dialogue and action on disarmament and security. Based in Geneva, UNIDIR assists the international community to develop the practical, innovative ideas needed to find solutions to critical security problems.

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Kim Won-soo (centre on dais), Acting UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, addresses the 2015 session of the Conference on Disarmament. Credit: © UN Photo/Jean Marc Ferré

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1. Summary

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) has played a significant role in the negotiation of several major multilateral agreements that continue to contribute to global peace and security. More recently, however, negotiation in the CD has reached an impasse, leaving it unable to make progress on its agenda at a point of growing geopolitical tension.

To address this issue, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), with the support of France and Germany, organized a high-level retreat in Montreux, Switzerland, on 22–23 June 2023 to discuss ideas to revitalize the work of the CD and its relationship with the wider disarmament machinery.

Seventy-nine participants from 60 States (including 51 CD Member States and 9 States that have applied for Observer status to the CD) participated in the retreat in their personal capacity. This document provides a factual summary of the discussion in Montreux. Every effort has been made to capture all the proposals that emerged from the discussion. These proposals are summarized below, beginning with “small steps” before proceeding to look at longer strides and more significant reforms related to the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament.

1.1 Small steps

Over the course of the retreat, participants identified several relatively ‘small’, short-term steps that could be taken to advance the work of the Conference on Disarmament without necessarily requiring a formal decision. These are summarized below:

- **Encourage the use of side events.** To engage with the wider community and build substantive understandings around technical issues, side events could be used more frequently in the work of the CD. Such events could focus on relevant substantive aspects of the work of the CD.
- **Build relations with the wider multilateral system.** CD Member States could improve engagement with other bodies working on disarmament-related issues, such as the OPCW and the ITU whose work could inform discussion in the CD. The Rules of Procedure empower the President to represent the CD externally.
- **Reintroduce the Yellow Book.** To enhance the CD’s community of practice, the UNODA CD Secretariat’s ‘Yellow Book’ of CD delegates could be re-introduced in digital or physical format and distributed to CD delegations. The UNODA CD Secretariat may be able to reintroduce this document using existing resources.
- **Soliciting views from civil society.** CD Member States and Observer-candidate States could further solicit views from civil society on the CD and its work. Such views could be reflected in national statements. The Rules of Procedure specify that NGOs can provide written communications which are to be made available by the UNODA CD Secretariat upon request of any delegation.

- **Fostering interactive discussion.** To stimulate more interactive exchanges in the CD, Member States could identify specific topics for discussion where interactivity is best suited and then develop mechanisms to foster interactive discussion through, for example, the use of informal sessions following formal plenary presentations.
- **Request input from the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters.** The Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters could be tasked to take a fresh look at the work of the CD and provide input on steps towards revitalization of the CD.
- **Invitations to the Disarmament Commission, First Committee and other bodies to provide briefings.** To better connect the work of the CD with that of the wider disarmament machinery and build a better understanding of the work of other bodies, including the Disarmament Commission, the First Committee and different GGEs and OEWDs, Member States and Presidents could invite the Chairs to provide briefings on the work undertaken in their respective forums.
- **Establish an annual calendar of CD meetings and P6 activities.** To coordinate presidencies and integrate the work of the CD with wider disarmament activities, the CD Member States, supported by the UNODA CD Secretariat, could develop an annual calendar of CD meetings for the entire year and consider coordinating presidencies, including to enable timely engagement with other relevant disarmament processes.
- **Task the UNODA CD Secretariat to play a more active role in briefing the CD.** If tasked by Member States to do so, the UNODA CD Secretariat could play a more active role in the work of the CD, for example by briefing Member States on wider disarmament activities, making connections between the CD and ongoing disarmament related bodies and processes, taking stock of wider disarmament processes and activities or producing background papers upon States' request. States could also task the Secretary-General of the CD with updating CD Member States on wider developments and trends related to arms control and disarmament.
- **Simplified programme of work.** Another option to avoid annual negotiations on a programme of work is taking a simplified approach focused on procedural matters, rather than the substance of the mandates for working groups or other bodies.
- **Special Coordinator for improved functioning of the CD.** To enhance the work of the CD, Member States could appoint a Special Coordinator to consult and collect the views of Member States on options for improved and effective functioning of the CD.
- **Disarmament stocktaking exercise.** To determine what relevant processes are taking place in the field of disarmament of interest to the work of the CD, Member States could agree to a stocktaking exercise. Such a step, which could benefit from input from the UNODA CD Secretariat, could map out opportunities for interaction with parallel processes, including GGEs, OEWDs and wider activities.
- **Develop a code of conduct for behavior in the CD.** To foster more constructive engagement in the CD, Member States could develop a 'code of conduct' or 'good faith agreement' that codifies unwritten rules for the operational practice of the CD. This could include, for example, informal agreements on the operationalization of consensus in the work of the CD.

1.2 Long strides

In addition to concrete small steps for revitalizing the CD, participants discussed a number of proposals for more challenging steps or 'long strides' that would likely require some sort of formal decision by the CD Member States. These proposals are summarized below.

- **Undertake an informal review process.** To take stock of the work of the CD and chart a course for future activities, Member States could agree to an informal review or peer-review process.
- **Establish a working group on CD revitalization.** CD Member States could establish a working group with an open and non-prescriptive mandate to review past experiences and provide options for the revitalization of the CD.
- **Preparatory meetings for SSOD-IV or other high-level meeting.** Several proposals for an SSOD-IV or other form of high-level meeting were identified. Any such meeting could benefit from a preparatory process or working group to pave the way for a successful outcome.
- **Special Rapporteur on membership.** To better understand Member States' views on the topic of membership enlargement, a Special Rapporteur on CD membership could be appointed.
- **Periodic review process.** States could agree to establish the practice of a more regular formal review of the work of the CD, perhaps taking place every 2 or 5 years. A Review Process could reflect on the past work of the CD and chart a course for future activities. The NPT or BWC could provide models for such a Review Process.
- **Reform the high-level segment.** The current high-level segment could be reformed to allow greater interaction and coordination among high-level participants. The high-level segment could further be combined with the work of other bodies, such as the First Committee. The presence of the UN Secretary General during the high-level segment could help enhance high level participation.
- **Attributing responsibility for the use of veto power.** To enable progress in the CD, Member States could attribute responsibility to any Member State that wields consensus as veto power and demand written explanations from those that block consensus.
- **Written statements on Observer objections.** To dissuade Member States from blocking Observer status applications, CD Member States could be obligated to submit written statements specifying the reasons for objecting to such applications.
- **Pursuit of pre-negotiations.** To enable the CD to carry out substantive preparatory work often required as an integral part of the process leading to the adoption of an international instrument, Member States could pursue pre-negotiations to: determine the feasibility, scope and parameters of future legal measures; identify elements of future legal measures; and elaborate non-binding measures that could form the basis for future legal measures.
- **Accept all requests for Observer status.** The process of approving applications for Observer status could be streamlined by routinely granting Observer status to all interested United Nations Member States.

1.3 Major reforms

Beyond the small steps and ‘long strides’ that could be undertaken to advance the work of the CD, several more significant proposals were discussed over the course of the retreat. These major reforms would likely require a formal decision by the CD Member States as well as amendment of the Rules of Procedure. As such, they are included for consideration as major reforms.

- **Establish time limits for interventions.** To enable more interactive discussion and to hear from a wider range of voices, time limits for CD interventions could be established. This practice is employed in other disarmament-related forums.
- **Reduce the number of annual presidencies.** To allow presidencies more time to complete their work, CD Member States could reduce the total number of presidencies from six to variously three, four or one per year.
- **Introduce constructive abstentions.** To enable progress in the work of the CD, Member States could encourage constructive abstention. Through this approach, which is applied to aspects of the work of the Council of the European Union, abstentions are allowed without blocking a unanimous decision unless more than a third of Member States abstain.
- **Rollover of the previous year’s programme of work.** To save time and energy on the annual process of negotiating a programme of work, Member States could agree to an automatic rollover of the programme of work from the previous year. The step could further enable continuity in the work of the CD.
- **‘Merging’ the CD with the Disarmament Commission.** To better integrate the work of the CD into the wider disarmament machinery, States could agree to merge the CD with the Disarmament Commission, in the process bringing the Commission to Geneva to create a ‘disarmament capital’ and making the most of overlapping expertise. This could be undertaken on a trial basis or, drawing from the ECOSOC example, could involve rotating the locations of Disarmament Commission sessions to include Geneva.
- **Organize an SSOD-IV or other form of high-level meeting.** To address a wider set of issues and consider the wider disarmament machinery in a holistic manner, States could organize an SSOD-IV or other form of high-level meeting.

2. Introduction

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) has played a significant role in the negotiation of several major multilateral agreements that continue to contribute to global peace and security. More recently, however, negotiations in the CD have reached an impasse and the Conference has been unable to make progress on its agenda at a point of growing geopolitical tension.

To address this issue, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), with the support of France and Germany, organized a high-level retreat in Montreux, Switzerland on 22–23 June 2023 to discuss ideas to revitalize the work of the CD and its relationship with the wider disarmament machinery.

Seventy-nine participants from 60 States (including 51 CD Member States and 9 States, which have applied for Observers status to the CD) participated in their personal capacity. In addition, staff from the Geneva branch of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs participated in the discussion.

The meeting was held under the ‘Chatham House rule’. As such “participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed”.

This document aims to provide a factual summary of the discussion in Montreux and draws out a number of proposals and ideas that emerged from the discussion. It is not the product of consensus among participants, but was developed by the UNIDIR rapporteur team that supported the event.



Journalists covering the high-level segment of the 2015 Disarmament Conference in Geneva. Credit: © UN Photo/Violaine Martin

3. Workshop sessions

The retreat was designed to foster forward-looking interactive discussion. To facilitate such discussion, the event comprised a mix of breakout groups and plenary sessions. The following sections summarize the discussion over the course of the three thematic breakout groups covering organizational structure; operational practice, including multilingualism; and the role of the CD and relations with the disarmament machinery; as well as the plenary discussion on membership and participation.

3.1 Organizational structure

Participants discussed proposals related to aspects of organizational structure, including the length and rotation of CD presidencies, the role of Subsidiary Bodies, whether there is a need for a review process, ways to increase continuity and prospects for the enhanced coordination of presidencies.

3.1.1 The length of CD presidencies

Some participants proposed reducing the total number of presidencies from six to variously three (to match the three parts of the yearly session), four or one per year thereby lengthening the duration of CD presidencies. Notably, participants acknowledged that the first presidency of each year bears the heaviest burden of trying to achieve the adoption of a programme of work. As such, some participants brought forward the idea of prolonging the first presidency. However, other participants suggested that this may be perceived as unfair towards the other presidencies, and that informal consultations ahead of the start of a presidency were a feasible and sufficient remedy to this issue. Moreover, many participants concurred that a change to the length of presidencies would not address the core challenges the CD is facing. Instead of extending the length of the first presidency some participants suggested addressing this particular issue through a standardized programme of work, i.e. one that is carried over from year to year. This could also contribute to more continuity.

3.1.2 Rotation of presidencies

Most participants appear to favour maintaining the existing alphabetical rotation of presidencies. Many argued that the alternative—a regional rotation of presidencies—would not be fair, given that regional groups vary significantly in size. Moreover, it was pointed out that this might generate incentives for the proliferation of such groups. The idea of introducing elections of CD presidents received no support and many participants suggested this would lead to the further politicization of the CD.

3.1.3 Periodic review process

Participants' views varied regarding the need for a review process and its applicability to the CD. Several participants contended that a review process would not be suitable for the CD, given that it is not a legal instrument but rather a forum for negotiation and that it also differs from the First Committee of the UNGA. Some participants, however, argued that the idea of regularly discussing how the CD is functioning had some merit. It was proposed that this could be done every 2 or 5 years and could help to increase trust and transparency. Moreover, this review could be carried out in a mix of formal and informal sessions to further involve civil society. A specific proposal for peer review was also raised, following the example of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council. In this regard, different proposals were discussed. These included undertaking a peer review process, following the example of the Universal Periodic Review of the HRC; the establishment of a working group on revitalization of the CD; the nomination of a Special Coordinator for revitalization; and review meetings within the CD itself, with the CD High-level segment providing a platform for coordination at ministerial level. The UNODA CD Secretariat could be tasked to support such a review exercise. Some participants remarked that a review process should address strategic challenges of the CD and could be done in a connection with an SSOD-IV.

3.1.4 Role of P6+2

Concerning ways of enhancing coordination between presidencies, several participants indicated that they were in favour of a more formal and structured role for the P6+2 as its coordination had enabled some degree of continuity. Some cautioned that too much institutionalization of the P6+2 could cause unnecessary bureaucracy. Some also expressed the view that coordination among the P6+2 would not necessarily be an issue if the CD could agree to undertake negotiations or other substantive work.

Concrete ideas on how to further institutionalize the P6+2 included establishing a calendar of CD meetings for the entire year, instead of one for each presidency, or giving each member of the P6 a specific role over the course of the year to foster coordination between the presidencies and, where timely, other relevant entities. A group of participants proposed enhancing coordination with Observer States, e.g. by inviting the coordinator of the Observer States to the P6+2 coordination meetings.

3.1.5 Establishment of a bureau

The idea of a bureau composed of vice-presidents from regional groups supporting the presidency was met with some support. It was suggested such a bureau could better harness the collective resources of the body, while another suggestion was that a bureau could be particularly helpful in providing support for the first and last presidencies of the year. It was noted that the appointment of a bureau could be difficult and electing bureau members could further politicize the CD. Participants mentioned that the P6+2 already function as a kind of bureau, providing important institutional memory and coordination, which could be fostered.

3.1.6 Ensuring continuity

Several participants lamented the lack of continuity from one year to another, arguing this made it more challenging to build on the previous years' work. It was noted that, unlike other areas of multi-lateralism, the CD is not able to make even incremental progress. One way to address this issue would be to enhance coordination among the presidencies of the previous, the current and the next years. Additionally, some participants proposed installing a Special Coordinator focused on ensuring continuity.

3.1.7 Subsidiary Bodies

Participants generally agreed that there was merit in the complementarity between presidencies, which act as coordinators and lead on procedural matters on the one hand; and Subsidiary Bodies, which on the other hand advance the substantive work and assess if there are areas of consensus to start negotiations.

According to several participants, the existing Rules of Procedure are flexible enough to allow Subsidiary Bodies to advance the work of the CD. Reference to previous work was underlined as an important practice to further enable the continuity of Subsidiary Bodies' work. Some participants highlighted the importance of more in-depth discussions in Subsidiary Bodies. In a similar vein, some underlined that Subsidiary Bodies could draw more on the resources provided by the UNODA CD Secretariat, e.g. for background papers and research. Another suggestion was to reduce the number of Subsidiary Bodies established per year and focus their work, for instance, by dealing with the same topics every year (i.e., a multi-year programme), thereby progressively fleshing out spaces of convergence. Alternatively, this could be achieved by presenting agreed conclusions in addition to an informal report under the responsibility of the coordinator, or by only focusing on a couple of topics per year.

3.2 Operational practice, including multilingualism

Participants discussed a range of topics, including the consensus rule in the CD, the allocation of resources for the CD, prospects for a renewable, multiyear, or simplified programme of work, as well as suggestions related to fostering interactive discussion and including gender and youth perspectives.

3.2.1 Fostering a CD community

To foster the CD's community of practice, reintroducing the UNODA CD Secretariat's 'Yellow Book' either in digital or physical format was proposed. This proposal gained support from several other participants and was seen as a concrete step that could facilitate the work of the CD. Another suggestion was to familiarize CD 'newcomers' with the work of the CD through the provision of the UNIDIR compendium and related materials prepared by the UNODA CD Secretariat.

3.2.2 Informal and interactive work

Many participants saw merit in more informal and interactive work in the CD. Some highlighted the need to distinguish between informal and formal work, as the informal meetings provide opportunities for useful information exchanges that do not necessarily need to be considered as formal. At the same time, some cautioned that informal meetings and associated Chair's summaries may not be the best option for capturing the diversity of Member States' views and should be carefully considered. It was proposed that Member States could identify specific aspects of CD discussion where interaction was best suited as more interactive sessions on general aspects of the work of the CD may not be productive. Moreover, as some participants pointed out, it would be up to the president to convene informal meetings and invite external speakers.

3.2.3 Side events

Several participants supported having more side events around the CD. Some specified that they should be focused on relevant aspects of the formal work of the CD and be conducted efficiently to make the most of the available time. It was noted that the availability of rooms in the Palais des Nations should be considered and that side events would not be recorded in the official process, in line with practice in other disarmament forums.

3.2.4 Consensus

Participants agreed that consensus was important, particularly given the CD's uniqueness as a disarmament negotiating body with limited membership. Furthermore, consensus in the past had enabled ownership, goodwill, universality and equality; in short, it reflected the spirit of multilateralism.

However, some participants expressed frustration with the perceived misuse of the consensus rule, which was seen by some as a spoiler rather than as a ‘safeguard’ of vital national interests in the CD. To this end, some participants indicated consensus should not be interpreted as unanimity and thereby used to veto ideas or block participation.

Many participants identified that the key issue surrounding consensus is not the rule itself, but the lack of trust and political will among Member States. To address this, it was suggested that Member States need to better understand the vital interests of other States as opposed to non-vital ones, as well as the appropriate use of the consensus rule. Various participants raised the entanglement between procedural and substantive issues as a problem linked to consensus and it was noted that lines are blurred between these concepts, and the interpretations are subjective. As such, a number of participants questioned the extent to which it is possible to distinguish between these issues. Others indicated it should be possible to distinguish between substantive and procedural issues otherwise consensus can be used around procedural issues to prevent the CD from reaching substantive outcomes. Moreover, a distinction between these concepts has been achieved in other forums, including the Security Council, which shows a precedent for such a fundamental distinction.

To address the fundamental interpretation of consensus, some participants proposed SSOD-IV as a suitable forum for this discussion. Others supported the development of a ‘code of conduct’ or ‘good faith agreement’ that would amalgamate unwritten rules on how the consensus rule should be used (and how it should not be used). Some participants argued that this could pave the way for a common understanding around interpreting the consensus rule. Others proposed the acceptance of decisions by a two-thirds voting majority or adopting constructive abstention in the style of the Council of the European Union. Yet others suggested attributing responsibility to Member States that wield consensus as veto power and proposed that the CD should require explanations from such States for blocking particular initiatives—a practice similar to that used in the Security Council and the General Assembly. These ideas were contested, however.

3.2.5 Programme of work (simplified or multiyear)

There was general agreement that the development of a multiyear or simplified programme of work had some merit and some participants pointed to the possibility of amending the Rules of Procedure to reflect this idea. Others proposed a multiyear programme of work to enable continuity and make the most of the time available to CD Member States. To this end, it was suggested that an automatic rollover of the Programme could be considered further, with a view to preventing inaction and retaining aspects of an agreed Programme to fuel further work. Many participants expressed an interest in studying these options further as a means to enhance the continuity of the CD’s work and save valuable resources and time.

However, some participants cautioned against seeking to change the Rules of Procedure and expressed concern that such a step might restrict the work of the CD. Others highlighted the difficulty of introducing a simplified or multiyear programme of work given the changing disarmament agenda and geopolitical climate. A number of participants also objected to an automatic rollover, while recognizing that this could have some utility in helping to break the stalemate around a programme of work.

3.2.6 Allocation of financial resources based on CD outcomes

Some participants suggested that the allocation of financial resources according to CD outcomes could foster greater focus and accountability in the work of the CD and potentially break the deadlock in its work. Other participants countered that such a step could complicate progress in the CD. It was generally agreed that the allocation of resources based on outcomes would be difficult for a variety of reasons, including the negative effect of resource cuts and pressure on CD Member States, as well as difficulties in predicting the context in which the CD would adopt decisions and start negotiations.

3.2.7 Prepared statements and right of reply

Regarding other conferencing practices, it was proposed to reconsider the recent practice of sending copies of statements to interpreters beforehand and opening formal lists of speakers and having the UNODA CD Secretariat keep lists of delegations requesting rights of reply. It was further argued that the recent practice of panel presentations followed by questions and national statements in plenary sessions on a weekly basis was excessive and undermined inclusivity and balance, and also hindered the scope for important interactive discussion between Member States and experts.

3.2.8 Working group on CD revitalization

A number of participants expressed interest in some form of working group with a general and non-prescriptive mandate to review past experiences and provide options for the revitalization of the CD. However, some participants questioned the merits of this idea. Others argued that expertise external to the CD—but embedded within multilateral organizations and in national capitals—had proved useful in the past and could be more involved in the CD in order to share good practices, harness interactivity, and invigorate interest in capitals in the CD's work.

3.2.9 Inclusion of gender, youth, and multilingualism

Several participants voiced support for enhanced inclusion of discussion around gender in the work of the CD. Other participants emphasized the importance of building a youth component into discussion in the CD. It was proposed to take a systemic approach to addressing CD issues and treating these issues as interlinked items, for example through integrating a gender perspective in the work of the Conference. Another participant suggested discussing women's inclusion and empowerment instead of gender. It was further suggested that gender and youth, while important, should be included in the CD to support its mandate on nuclear disarmament and not hinder it. Participants discussed the importance of multilingualism but some expressed concern over the budgetary implications of the possible widening of its scope.

3.3 Role of the CD and relations with the disarmament machinery

The CD is not a United Nations organ per se. However, it is connected to the United Nations General Assembly and the wider disarmament machinery. Accordingly, participants discussed the relationship between the CD and the wider disarmament machinery with a particular focus on relations with the General Assembly First Committee, the Disarmament Commission and various other bodies working on disarmament-related issues, including the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, Open-ended Working Groups and Groups of Governmental Experts. .

3.3.1 The CD and the First Committee

Participants recognized that the Conference on Disarmament and the First Committee have different functions, membership, frequencies of meetings and scope. Moreover, it was argued that the CD is a unique body that should remain relatively independent. However, some felt that the different disarmament bodies are operating in silos and linkages between the two needed to be revived with relevant resolutions and requests of the General Assembly systematically discussed in the CD, including calls to revitalize and reform the CD.

In advancing the role of the CD and relations with the First Committee, participants discussed several concrete suggestions. These included the allocation of time in the CD to discussion of First Committee resolutions and inviting the Chair of the First Committee to speak at the CD. Such interactions, it was argued, could help to provide context to the work of the CD and a better understanding of the interconnected nature of global security issues. It was suggested that this could potentially help shape the programme of work for the year and enable the CD to further address interconnected global security issues. It was also noted that the New Agenda for Peace will include a call for a new vision for disarmament that could contribute to this discussion and provide further recommendations on reshaping the current disarmament machinery linkages.

3.3.2 The CD and the Disarmament Commission

On the relationship between the CD and the Disarmament Commission, several participants indicated that these bodies have different roles and responsibilities and different memberships. Specifically, the CD was designed to negotiate, whereas the Disarmament Commission was intended to deliberate. As such, some participants felt that these bodies should remain distinct. However, others suggested that deliberative and negotiating functions are, in practice, interconnected and overlapping and that there was a need to revitalize relations between the CD and the Disarmament Commission.

To enhance the linkage between these two bodies, several proposals were identified. In the short term, useful concrete steps could include building a better understanding of the respective mandates of these two bodies. Others suggested possible invitations to the Disarmament Commission to provide briefings on their work to the CD and thus opening lines of communication and coordination between these two bodies.

Beyond these smaller steps, several participants raised the idea of ‘merging’ the CD with the Disarmament Commission and bringing the latter to Geneva, making it the disarmament capital of the United Nations. Such a step, it was argued, could make the most of overlapping expertise and better connect the two bodies. It was further suggested that such a merger could be undertaken on a trial basis and could involve, for instance, moving the high-level segment of the CD to New York as part of the work of the First Committee or, taking into account the ECOSOC example, moving Disarmament Commission sessions to Geneva every two years.

Several participants indicated interest in further exploring this idea; however other participants were more cautious, recognizing the limitations of the Disarmament Commission and the considerable reform any merger would entail.

3.3.3 Organize a SSOD-IV or other high-level meeting

Several participants raised the idea of an SSOD-IV or other form of high-level meeting. Some felt the geopolitical context was ill suited to a successful SSOD event (e.g. in terms of producing a concrete and positive outcome) and an SSOD-IV would be premature and potentially risky and could even have a negative impact the disarmament architecture. As such, small steps could be preferable. Several others argued that there was no perfect context, and CD Member States should not wait to begin preparations for an SSOD-IV as this would provide the most suitable and effective means to address a wider set of issues. It was noted that an SSOD-IV would require a working group or ‘stepping stone’ process to effectively prepare for a successful outcome and to raise interest. Others suggested that some form of **high-level meeting**, like the one convened by the Secretary-General in 2010, separate from an SSOD or current high-level segments, could advance the CD and pointed to how this had helped with developing a programme of work in the past. This process too would require considerable preparation.

3.3.4 Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

It was suggested that the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters might play a role in bringing a fresh look and different perspective on the revitalization of the CD, however others were less familiar with this body and suggested that this would not overcome political challenges manifest in the CD. Some participants indicated that greater clarity on the capacity or means through which such a body would communicate with the CD could be useful.

3.3.5 Systematic engagement with OEWGs and GGEs

Some participants pointed to a disconnect between the CD and related work on topics such as PAROS and other space security issues or nuclear disarmament verification being undertaken in Open-ended Working Groups (OEWGs) and Groups of Governmental Experts (GGE) respectively. Several participants suggested breaking down silos separating the CD and other such entities and pointed to the value of past interaction between bodies such as the First and Sixth Committees, or focused interaction on outer space issues between the First and Fourth Committees.

Several small, yet concrete, steps were put forward to foster more systematic engagement between the CD and OEWGs and GGEs. Several participants proposed that the CD presidencies could invite representatives of other bodies to brief the CD in a systematic manner. Others suggested that CD Member States could establish the practice of relevant GGE and OEWG Chairs reporting back on what happened in their respective meetings. To facilitate interaction, some participants suggested that it could be useful to undertake a stocktaking exercise to determine what relevant processes are taking place that could be of interest to the work of the CD and possibly improve its effectiveness.

3.3.6 Tasking the UNODA Secretariat

It was suggested that the UNODA CD Secretariat was currently somewhat of a ‘silent partner’ in CD-related discussions. Accordingly, it was proposed that the UNODA CD Secretariat could play a more active role variously through making connections between different bodies, including GGEs and OEWGs, or providing briefings on mandates and resolutions, if tasked to do so by Member States. Additionally, it was proposed that the Secretariat, if tasked to do so, could prepare a non-paper which could include a compilation of practical measures that could be undertaken without modification of the Rules of Procedure, including a description of the evolution of practice in the CD over time.

3.3.7 Inviting further substantive input from the Secretary General of the CD

It was also suggested that the Secretary-General of the CD could be further involved, if tasked to do so, for example, through updating CD Member States on wider developments and trends related to arms control and disarmament.

3.3.8 Explore pre-negotiations

It was proposed that CD Member States could explore pre-negotiations, including by seeking to elaborate and agree on substantive outcomes with the aim of narrowing differences over time and seeking to build consensus that can facilitate future negotiations on legal measures. Such outcomes could have many aims, including determining the feasibility, scope and parameters of future legal measures; identifying and making recommendations on elements of future legal measures; and elaborating on non-binding measures that could form the basis for future legal measures.

3.3.9 Making more of the high-level segments

Several participants touched upon the role of the high-level segments. Some identified limitations in the current approach to the high-level segment, suggesting it was sometimes difficult to convince high-level participants to come to the CD to make statements. To address this point, participants proposed organizing the high-level segment as a ministerial meeting of the CD; facilitating informal debate among high-level participants; or inviting the SG to come to Geneva during the high-level segment with a view to encouraging high-level participation.

3.3.10 Improving communication within the disarmament machinery and beyond

Several participants suggested that there was a need to improve communication between the CD and all United Nations Member States to ensure greater accountability and credibility, as well as to reduce potential concerns on the part of non-Member States regarding the ongoing discussions within the CD. Beyond the disarmament machinery, several participants also stressed the need to better communicate with the world at large, including with civil society whose input could help to better capture the evolving security environment, in particular with regards to new technologies.

A wide view of the High-Level Segment 2022 of the Conference on Disarmament. Credit: © UN Photo/Violaine Martin



3.4 Membership and participation

The event included a plenary session dedicated to CD membership and participation. The discussion covered several topics including the status of Observers, CD membership enlargement, and the role of civil society, United Nations agencies, and scientific and technical expertise.

3.4.1 Observers

The plenary session gathered participants from CD Member States and States which have applied for Observer status to the CD. Many participants were supportive of approving applications for Observer status and a number of participants highlighted the benefits of having more Observers at the CD as their interests demonstrate the CD's relevance, bring in outside views and voices on common global matters, and boost inclusivity and diversity in the spirit of multilateralism. Given the nature of the CD as a body supported by the United Nations and financed by all Member States, some participants believed it should be accessible to all States universally and that requests for Observer status should be granted without political obstructions. However, the added value of the contribution of Observer was questioned.

In reforming the process of approval of Observer status applications, several participants supported consistently granting Observer status to all requesting States. Some participants explicitly emphasized that non-Member States of the United Nations should also be considered. It was also stated that the Informal Group of Observer States to the CD needs to be included in consultations on matters steering the CD. Other practical measures suggested included a streamlined application approval process to avoid interested States having to reapply every year, and further that this should be resolved through a simplified solution using the working methods instead of revising the Rules of Procedure. Others suggested that CD Member States objecting to applications for Observer status should be obliged to submit written statements specifying the reasons for objecting in lieu of outright objection. Some participants, on the other hand, disagreed on the consistent acceptance of Observers to the CD as it contradicts the Rules of Procedure and that this practice has no precedence in other disarmament regimes.

3.4.2 Membership

Several participants raised the importance of CD membership enlargement and aligning the CD with the evolving nature of the international community and the importance of disarmament to all States as per the Final Document of SSOD-I. The importance of ensuring geographical and political balance was noted by a participant as a requirement in CD membership enlargement. A number of participants favoured universalizing the CD membership. However, some participants expressed doubts over expanding the CD membership, suggesting that the CD has limited membership for a reason and that increasing the number of CD Member States could hinder progress and jeopardize consensus.

There was some convergence on the need to further discuss membership enlargement. Some participants proposed appointing a Special Rapporteur or Coordinator dedicated to this topic. Others, however, pointed to the necessity of strictly adhering to the Rules of Procedure and the original criteria of CD enlargement based on the classification of “militarily significant States”. As proposed in discussions on the disarmament machinery, the merging of the Disarmament Commission and the CD in Geneva could also expand membership to all interested United Nations Member States.

3.4.3 Civil society, United Nations agencies, and scientific and technical expertise

Most participants recognized the value of non-State expertise in disarmament forums, specifically pointing to the role of civil society, United Nations agencies, and scientific and technical experts in disarmament discussions. It was suggested that these entities play an important role in the CD and beyond and their input enriches discussions. Other participants, however, questioned whether civil society is still interested in participating in the work of the CD given the lack of negotiations. Some also suggested that scientific and technical expertise is needed but mainly when negotiations are taking place.

Regarding the parameters for civil society participation in the CD, a number of participants queried the extent to which organizations from all regions can actually access the CD. Several participants expressed concern that civil society participation was skewed towards Geneva/Europe-based organizations’ linguistic advantage and proximity to the CD, and called for regional and topical balance in civil society participants as favouritism for certain organizations damages the CD’s reputation. To avoid excessive civil society involvement, a participant suggested that interested organizations should be evaluated for their relevance and the added value they could bring to the CD’s work, adding that such organizations should be subject to approval prior to their participation. Another participant expressed the need to review the definition of ‘civil society’ as a small group of such organizations does not present all civil society perspectives. They suggested that CD Member States solicit views from civil society in their national capacity and reflect these views in national statements. A participant noted the definition of ‘civil society’ in a past CD working paper and argued for its consideration in formal language instead of amending the Rules of Procedure.

On the modalities of civil society’s contribution to the CD’s work, the merit of reflecting written submissions and in-person participation akin to those of the Human Rights Council at the CD was highlighted. In addition, another participant encouraged Member States to engage in interactive dialogue with civil society without raising issues unrelated to the discussion when experts are invited to the CD. On the utilization of competence in United Nations agencies and other intergovernmental organizations, many participants agreed on the need for improved engagement with the OPCW and the ITU given their respective experience in disarmament science and technology as well as negotiating CD-related outer space issues.

Annex – An illustrative compendium of proposals submitted to the Conference on Disarmament

Introduction

Objectives

This compendium aims to provide an illustrative list of past proposals for reforming or revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament. The document does not seek to evaluate or assess the various proposals for CD reform but provides a factual overview of previous proposals with a view to informing discussions on steps which could be considered to revitalize the conference.

Methods

The proposals have been identified through an independent review carried out by UNIDIR of publicly available official CD documentation, specifically working papers, plenary records and related official materials dating from 2010 through 31 July 2023. As such, this illustrative compendium does not include the wealth of proposals from civil society or NGOs, unless such proposals are reflected in the official documentation of the CD (e.g., as an annex to working papers). The collected proposals have been summarized with supporting evidence available through the footnotes.

Structure

To aid accessibility, this introductory section is followed by a brief factual overview of the CD. The factual overview is then followed by summaries of past CD proposals. Although several proposals are cross cutting, for the purpose of this report they are listed under four headings that structured the discussion at the High-Level Retreat that UNIDIR convened in Montreux: organizational structure; operational practice, including multilingualism; membership and participation; and the relationship between the CD and the disarmament machinery.

Limitations

Every effort has been made to go through past CD proposals systematically within the time available to produce this report. However, this is an illustrative compendium of proposals—it is not exhaustive. UNIDIR also notes that these proposals do *not* necessarily enjoy consensus; indeed, on many of these issues States disagree. Furthermore, the context in which some of these proposals were originally made may have changed, in some cases dramatically.

Background to the Conference on Disarmament

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) was established at the First Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly (SSOD-I) in 1978, as “a single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum”. The CD succeeded other negotiating forums, including the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament. .

Membership

The CD originally had 40 Member States; however, membership has since expanded, and the CD currently has 65 Member States. This includes nuclear-weapon States as well as other States of “key military significance”.¹ Since the establishment of the CD, several requests for membership have been submitted to the Conference. In addition, other interested United Nations Member States are invited to participate in substantive discussions as non-Member ‘Observer’ States on a yearly basis. Participation as a non-Member ‘Observer’ State has been subject to the CD’s annual approval of their requests.

Meetings

The annual CD session is divided into three parts of 10-, 7- and 7-weeks duration with the first part beginning in the penultimate week of January. Meetings comprise formal and informal plenaries, with formal plenaries open to observers and the public, while informal plenaries are ordinarily internal to Members.

Regional groups

CD Members are divided into four regional groups: the Western European and Others Group, the Group of 21, the Eastern Europe Group, and the Group of One. Regional Group Coordinators facilitate regional group consultations and may present working papers on behalf of their respective groups.

Presidencies

The presidency of the Conference rotates among all its Members in alphabetical order with each President presiding for a four-working-week period. As per the Rules of Procedure, the President is responsible for representing the CD in its relations with States, and with the General Assembly and other organs of the United Nations, in addition to their usual chairing functions.

P6+2

The six CD Presidents of the year (the P6), the final President of the previous year and first President of the next year (the +2) form the P6+2 and hold weekly informal consultations in preparation of the work of the Conference.

1 UNODA, “Conference on Disarmament”, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/conference-on-disarmament>.

Subsidiary Bodies

As per the Rules of Procedure, when deemed advisable, the Conference may establish Subsidiary Bodies including ad hoc subcommittees, working groups, technical groups, or groups of governmental experts, open to all Member States of the Conference unless the Conference decides otherwise. The CD established Subsidiary Bodies most recently in 2022, when five such bodies were established to address key CD agenda items.

Relationship with other disarmament bodies

The Conference on Disarmament is often described as an ‘autonomous body’. The CD is responsible for its own agenda and Rules of Procedure.² However, the CD is recognized by the United Nations³ and has played an important role as part of the United Nations multilateral disarmament machinery. The CD is financed through the United Nations, reports to the General Assembly, is serviced by personnel from the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and is hosted in the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Director-General of which also serves as the Secretary-General of the CD.

Rules of Procedure

The Rules of Procedure for the CD were adopted and issued in 1979. Since 1979, there have been several amendments⁴ that reflect, inter alia, changes in country name, the expansion of membership or editorial changes (e.g., “Delegations” became “delegations”).

Agenda and issues

The CD agenda, as outlined in SSOD-I, contains 10 overarching issues. As of 2023, the following ‘core items’ have been identified on the CD agenda: cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament; prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters; prevention of an arms race in outer space; effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons, radiological weapons; comprehensive programme of disarmament, and transparency in armaments.

Current situation

Despite several achievements in the mid to late 1990s, the forum has since become deadlocked and largely unable to agree on a Programme of Work that would chart out concrete negotiations on its issues.⁵ Many CD Member States have expressed frustration at the inability of the CD to effectively resume its work as a negotiating forum.

2 UNIDIR (2012), “The Conference on Disarmament: Issues and Insights”, <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/the-conference-on-disarmament-issues-and-insights-395.pdf>.

3 UNIDIR (2019), “Mandate and Working Methods in the CD - A Historical Perspective”, <https://unidir.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/mandates-and-working-methods-in-the-cd-a-historical-perspective-en-769.pdf>.

4 Currently the Rules of Procedure are laid out in [CD/8/Rev.10](#), 28 July 2022.

5 UNIDIR (2010), “The Conference on Disarmament: Breaking the Ice”, <https://unidir.org/publication/conference-disarmament-breaking-ice>.

Organizational structure

This section on organizational structure includes proposals related to, inter alia, the length of CD Presidencies; calls for a systematic report of the work of the CD, including through a group of eminent persons and expert panels; and proposals related to Subsidiary Bodies, ad hoc committees, working groups, etc., including proposals related to refocusing and empowering such bodies.

Length of CD presidencies

Paragraph 9 of the Rules of Procedure stipulates that “each President shall preside for a four-working-week period”.⁶ However, several States have suggested that four-week presidencies are too short and this “diminishe[s] the possibility of taking action” and makes it “harder to ensure continuity”.⁷ To address these limitations, some States have proposed extending the length of presidencies variously to six weeks⁸ or a “twice-yearly rotation of the presidency”⁹ in order to enable “greater continuity, consistency and leadership”.¹⁰ It has also been suggested there could be value to “possible regional, as opposed to the present alphabetical, rotation” of presidencies.¹¹

Periodic review process

In other disarmament agreements, provision has been made for a five-yearly review process. No such provision exists for the CD. However, some States have proposed a periodic process of self-reflection or review for the CD.¹² States have suggested that such a review process, which could operate on a 5- or 10-yearly basis, could review the CD “working methods in detail”,¹³ or provide a “thorough assessment and reality check”.¹⁴

Special coordinator on working methods

Several States have raised the idea of drawing on outside expertise to advise on the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament. Various approaches to this have been identified (see below for discussion on Eminent Persons and the Troika). One working paper specifically raised the idea of appointing “a special coordinator on the efficiency and working methods of the CD, who would analyse its procedures and make recommendations to its members”.¹⁵

6 [Rules of Procedure of the CD](#).

7 Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011.

8 Australia (2020), [CD/2197](#), 18 September 2020.

9 Chile (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 August 2011.

10 ASG of the CD, Moller (2014), [CD/PV.1319](#), 10 June 2014.

11 Finland (2012), [CD/PV.1256](#), 27 March 2012.

12 See, for example, Switzerland (2013), [CD/PV.1286](#), 24 May 2013; Colombia (2011), [CD/PV.1226](#), 26 May 2011; Republic of Korea (2011), [CD/PV.1226](#), 26 May 2011.

13 Switzerland (2013), [CD/PV.1286](#), 24 May 2013.

14 Nigeria (2022), [CD/PV.1608](#), 28 Feb 2022.

15 See Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011; Switzerland (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011.

Group of eminent persons

In considering possible courses of action for strengthening the Conference on Disarmament, one working paper discussed the idea of setting up a “panel of political figures” from “outside the CD” that could be tasked with making proposals related to the CD.¹⁶ Another similar proposal was to establish a “group of eminent persons” that could be assigned to explore ways to revitalize the work of the CD.¹⁷

Enhanced role for Regional Coordinators

Some States have identified additional or enhanced roles for Regional Group Coordinators. For example, one working paper discussed the appointment of a “troika” of coordinators reflecting regional groups that could be called upon to “address working methods and expansion of the membership”;¹⁸ others have called for “the coordinators of regional groups to enhance their engagement with the Observer States”.¹⁹

Establishment of Subsidiary Bodies, ad hoc committees, working groups, etc.

Paragraph 23 of the Rules of Procedure states that “Whenever the Conference deems it advisable for the effective performance of its functions, including when it appears that there is a basis to negotiate a draft treaty or other draft texts, the Conference may establish Subsidiary Bodies, such as ad hoc sub committees, working groups, technical groups or groups of governmental experts”. Some States have expressed support for the establishment of such bodies with a view to paving the way for negotiations and building on previous work.²⁰ The CD has established Subsidiary Bodies in the past, most recently in 2022, to undertake substantive work on core issues.²¹

Refocusing the work of Subsidiary Bodies

Paragraph 24 of the Rules of Procedure states that “meetings of the Subsidiary Bodies shall be informal unless the Conference decides otherwise”. Some States have proposed that Subsidiary Bodies could benefit from a yet more flexible approach that would allow for greater interactivity.²² Other States have indicated support for making Subsidiary Bodies of greater duration, with “at least six sessions” and empowered with a more “precise mandate”;²³ or more structured through, inter alia,

16 Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011.

17 Kazakhstan (2012), [CD/PV.1249](#), 28 February 2012.

18 Argentina (2019), [CD/PV.1489](#), 28 February 2019.

19 Observer States (2010), [CD/1886](#), 7 April 2010.

20 Australia (2020), [CD/2197](#), 18 September 2020; Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of G-21 (2020), [CD/PV.1196](#); Algeria (2019), [CD/PV.1494](#), 12 March 2019.

21 Colombia (2011), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011; Russian Federation (2022), [CD/PV.1599](#), 27 January 2022; Algeria (2019), [CD/PV.1494](#), 12 March 2019; Japan (2018), [CD/PV.1448](#), 27 February 2018.

22 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

23 Russian Federation (2023), [CD 1st Part](#), 16 March 2023, 10:38.

keeping meetings on the record and presenting progress from one meeting to the next, with a view to achieving more substantial results.²⁴ Another proposal seeking to orient the CD on substantive agenda items recommends delinking the adoption of a Programme of Work from the establishment of Subsidiary Bodies, having the latter be established through a separate decision.²⁵

Empowerment of Subsidiary Body Coordinators

Some States have proposed further empowering Subsidiary Body Coordinators with more agency to structure discussions, including through the development of an agenda and timetables, in a manner similar to the role played by Chairs of Open-ended Working Groups and Groups of Governmental Experts.²⁶ To reduce the need for Subsidiary Body reports to reflect only issues and positions on which consensus can be immediately reached, it has also been proposed that Subsidiary Body reports could be prepared under the sole authority of the coordinators as “non-binding” documents. These conclusions could further be supplemented with an additional, formally agreed section of “agreed conclusions”, reflecting “ideas that all states are comfortable in supporting”.²⁷

24 Japan (2018), [CD/PV.1448](#), 27 February 2018.

25 Kingdom of the Netherlands (2019), [CD/2165](#), 8 August 2018.

26 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

27 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

Operational practice, including multilingualism

This section looks at issues related to the operational practice of the CD. It includes proposals related to the application of the consensus rule in the CD, gender neutrality, the allocation of resources for the CD, prospects for a renewable, multiyear, or simplified programme of work, as well as suggestions related to fostering interactive discussion.

Consensus rule

Paragraph 18 of the Rules of Procedure states that “the Conference shall conduct its work and adopt its decisions by consensus”. Many States have stressed the importance of the principle of consensus in the work of the Conference.²⁸ Some States have proposed reflecting on the limitations presented by the consensus rule and recognizing that not every aspect of the CD’s work necessarily requires consensus. For example, it has been suggested that “procedural matters do not have the same importance as questions of substance”, at least in so far as procedural matters can clearly be separated from substantive matters.²⁹ Others have identified alternatives to the consensus approach, including, for example, a “no-objection, or silence, procedure” to achieve consensus in subsidiary bodies;³⁰ or employing a “24-hour period of deferment” to allow the Chair time to facilitate consensus.³¹

Gender neutrality

In some languages, the Rules of Procedure of the Conference on Disarmament refer to delegates using only male pronouns. For example, in the English version of the Rules of Procedure, paragraph 10 on the Presidency of the CD states that “*he* may be replaced by a member of *his* delegation” (emphasis added). Several States have proposed updating the Rules of Procedure to ensure that the text reflects gender equality in all languages.³² In 2021, a draft decision was presented for a “technical/linguistic update of the Conference’s rules of procedure to reflect the fact that both women and men can equally participate in the work of the Conference”.³³

28 See, for example, Belarus (2014), [CD/PV.1302](#), 21 January 2014; Italy (2020), [CD/1897](#), 14 September 2020; China (2023), [CD 1st Part](#), 16 March, 2023, 11:15

29 Italy (2020), [CD/1897](#), 14 September 2020; see also Norway (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 August 2011.

30 Republic of Korea (2022), [CD/PV.1626](#), 28 June 2022.

31 Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011.

32 See, for example, Australia (2020), [CD/2197](#), 18 September 2020; Cuba (2022), [CD/1621](#), 24 May 2022; Republic of Korea (2022), [CD/PV.1599](#), 27 January 2022.

33 United Nations (2021), [CD/2223](#), 14 September 2021.

Review the allocation of resources

The budget of the CD is funded from the United Nations regular budget and therefore must be approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Some States have raised the idea of “making the future allocation of resources for the Conference on Disarmament dependent on actual progress”.³⁴ An annex to a CD document raised a similar question of whether “more conditionality might be attached by the General Assembly of the United Nations to the availability of resources, making agreement of a work programme a *sine qua non* to funding beyond a defined period—say one month—at the beginning of the annual session”.³⁵

Renewable or multi-year programme of work

Paragraph 28 of the Rules of Procedure states that “On the basis of its agenda, the Conference, at the beginning of its annual session, shall establish its programme of work, which will include a schedule of its activities for that session”. Considering that agreeing to an annual programme of work on the core items contained on the agenda of the CD, as per its mandate, has not been achieved since 2009, some States have proposed alternative approaches to reaching agreement around a programme of work. For example, some States have proposed adopting a comprehensive balanced programme of work based on the CD agenda and then automatically renewing the programme of work “unless the Conference members agree otherwise”.³⁶ Others have encouraged the introduction of “a multi-year programme of work ... adopted in one session and reaffirmed at the beginning of subsequent sessions”.³⁷

Simplified programme of work

To address the challenge of agreeing to an annual programme of work, several States have proposed a ‘simplified’ or ‘simple’ programme of work focused on procedural matters, rather than the substance of the mandates for working groups or other bodies.³⁸ For some CD Member States, a simplified programme of work is identified as a useful means of enabling the CD to move forward and escape the current deadlock.³⁹

34 Austria (2011), [CD/PV.1209](#), 28 February 2011.

35 Colombia (2011), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011.

36 Italy (2020), [CD/1897](#), 14 September 2020; see also United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

37 Zimbabwe (2019), [CD/PV.1504](#), 6 June 2019.

38 See, for example, Colombia (2011), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011; Chile (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Canada (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Mexico (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Switzerland (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Ireland (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Argentina (2021), [CD/PV.1581](#), 11 June 2021; Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2020), [CD/PV.1535](#), 26 Feb 2020; Kingdom of the Netherlands (2021), [CD/PV.1587](#), 10 Aug 2021.

39 See, for example, Switzerland (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Chile (2010), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011.

Establish a working group for the revitalization of the CD

Several States have proposed the establishment of a working group,⁴⁰ not only on substantive issues, but also to focus on the revitalization of the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Alternatively, States could once again convene an “informal group, composed of seven heads of delegation acting in a personal capacity, to study various aspects of the issue”.⁴¹

Foster informal, interactive discussion

Sessions in the CD often take the form of national statements followed by rights of reply, with limited space for an interactive discussion. Some States have therefore proposed there could be a “more interactive format for the ad hoc committees” and related bodies.⁴² This could be achieved through, for example, the use of expert panels followed by discussion between experts and Member States, before the delivery of national statements.⁴³ The CD has made use of this practice during its 2023 sessions.

Use of side events

Other disarmament forums make regular use of side events to foster substantive discussion and engage informally with non-governmental experts. In the past, CD Member States have organized side events on core CD themes. Recognizing the value of side events, some States have proposed making greater use of them to complement CD discussions.⁴⁴

40 Chile (2017), [CD/PV.1403](#), 31 January 2017; Serbia (2012), [CD/PV.1262](#), 14 June 2012; Brazil (2011), [CD/PV.1233](#), 18 August 2011; Russian Federation (2011), [CD/PV.1232](#), 11 August 2011.

41 Switzerland (2013), [CD/PV.1289](#), 11 June 2013.

42 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

43 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

44 Switzerland (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011.

Membership and participation, including the possibility of membership enlargement

This section on membership and participation covers proposals related to the enlargement of CD membership, streamlining the approval of requests for Observer status as well as proposals linked to enhancing participation from civil society, technical experts, and United Nations specialized agencies.

Membership enlargement

While the CD originally had 40 Member States, provision was made in paragraph 2 of the Rules of Procedure for a review of the “membership of the Conference” at regular intervals. Membership of the CD was expanded on three occasions in the 1990s. At present, there are 65 CD Member States. Some States have criticized the limitation in membership and many States have proposed the enlargement of CD membership to reflect the principle of equality, offer fresh ideas or provide greater accountability.⁴⁵

Special Rapporteur on membership

To further explore the possibility of enlarging CD membership, several States have proposed the appointment of a Special Coordinator or Rapporteur on the expansion of the membership of the CD.⁴⁶ As in past cases, such a Special Coordinator or Rapporteur could be tasked to collect the views of Member States and “review the issue of membership”.⁴⁷

Reviewing Observer State approval

As per its practice and the Rules of Procedure, the CD annually invites interested non-CD Member States to participate in its work as Observers, subject to approval by the Conference. The approval of Observers has become difficult in recent years, and some States have called for a “review of the mechanism for assessing Observer State requests for membership”⁴⁸ or simply carrying “over any previously approved observer from year to year”.⁴⁹ Others have suggested Regional Group Coordinators could also help to enhance “engagement with the Observer States”.⁵⁰

45 See, for example, Australia (2020), [CD/2197](#), 18 September 2020; G-21 (2010), [CD/1894](#), 14 September 2010; G-21 (2011), [CD/1922](#), 13 September 2011; G-21 (2013), [CD/1958](#), 9 September 2013; Croatia (2010), [CD/PV.1195](#), 31 August 2010; G-21 (2012), [CD/1939](#), 28 August 2012; Mongolia (2022), [CD/PV.1620](#), 19 May 2022; Philippines (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#); Slovakia (2022), [CD/PV.1598](#), 25 January 2022; Kazakhstan (2021), [CD/PV.1550](#), 21 January 2021; China (2019), [CD/PV.1475](#), 21 January 2019; Kenya (2017), [CD/PV.1414](#), 17 March 2017; Pakistan (2017), [CD/PV.1413](#), 14 March 2017; Syrian Arab Republic on behalf of G-21 (2012), [CD/1939](#), 28 August 2012.

46 Serbia (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Morocco (2018), [CD/PV.1440](#), 13 February 2018; Iraq (2013), [CD/PV.1279](#), 26 February 2013; Slovakia (2012), [CD/PV.1262](#), 14 June 2012; Kazakhstan (2011), [CD/PV.1223](#), 17 May 2011.

47 Estonia (2013), [CD/PV.1279](#), 26 February 2013.

48 Saudi Arabia (2022) [CD/PV.1608](#), 28 February 2022.

49 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

50 Observer States (2010), [CD/1886](#), 7 April 2010.

Civil society participation

In comparison to other disarmament negotiation forums, civil society participation in the CD is limited. Some States have argued that this is detrimental to progress in the CD⁵¹ as civil society input can enrich discussions⁵² and provide substantive input to the forum, especially in areas such as nuclear disarmament,⁵³ gender,⁵⁴ and youth.⁵⁵ One proposal defined civil society organizations as those registered with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁵⁶ Several States have called for greater civil society participation.⁵⁷ It has also been indicated that “the granting to non-governmental organizations of permanent observer status at the Conference, would enhance the effectiveness of our forum’s work and help to improve its accountability before the international community”.⁵⁸ It has also been proposed that civil society representatives should be invited to express their views during CD sessions or via written proposals or working documents on subjects of negotiation at the CD.⁵⁹

Scientific and technical experts

Under paragraph 22 of the Rules of Procedure, the CD “may hold informal meetings, with or without experts, to consider as appropriate substantive matters as well as questions concerning its organization of work”. As part of wider negotiations around specific topics, some States have indicated support for the participation of scientific and technical experts, not as a form of pre-negotiation, but with a view to exchanging ideas on specific substantive issues.⁶⁰

51 Austria (2013), [CD/PV.1298](#), 27 August 2013; Norway (2010), [CD/PV.1194](#), 24 August 2010; Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011; Austria (2011), [CD/PV.1204](#), 10 February 2011; Austria (2013), [CD/PV.1298](#), 27 August 2013; Bangladesh (2011), [CD/PV.1200](#), 27 January 2011; Indonesia (2010), [CD/PV.1195](#), 31 August 2010.

52 Norway (2010), [CD/PV.1194](#), 24 August 2010.

53 G-21 (2010), [CD/1894](#), 14 September 2010; G-21 (2011), [CD/1922](#), 13 September 2011; G-21 (2012), [CD/1939](#), 28 August 2012; G-21 (2013), [CD/1958](#), 9 September 2013.

54 Mexico (2021), [CD/PV.1592](#), 26 August 2021.

55 Viet Nam (2021), [CD/PV.1588](#), 12 August 2021.

56 Mexico (2015), [CD/WP.585](#), 4 February 2015.

57 Australia (2020), [CD/2197](#), 18 September 2020; Croatia (2010), [CD/PV.1195](#), 31 August 2010; Belarus on behalf of EEG (2011), [CD/PV.1200](#), 27 Jan 2011; Ireland (2013), [CD/1957](#), 26 August 2013; Switzerland (2016), [CD/PV.1374](#), 16 February 2016; South Africa (2015), [CD/PV.1336](#), 10 February 2015; Spain (2015), [CD/PV.1344](#), 3 March 2015; Austria (2014), [CD/PV.1316](#), 20 May 2014; Syrian Arab Republic on behalf of G-21 (2012), [CD/1939](#), 28 August 2012.

58 Belarus (2010), [CD/PV.1195](#), 31 August 2010.

59 Mexico (2015), [CD/WP.585](#), 4 February 2015.

60 Finland (2016), [CD/PV.1362](#), 11 August 2016; Germany (2012), [CD/PV.1259](#), 31 May 2012; Kingdom of the Netherlands (2012), [CD/PV.1259](#), 31 May 2012.

Role of the CD and relations with the disarmament machinery

This section on membership and participation covers proposals related to the enlargement of CD. While the CD is not a United Nations organ per se, it is connected to the United Nations' General Assembly and the wider disarmament machinery. Accordingly, this section looks at proposals to advance the role of the CD in relation to other elements of the disarmament machinery. It includes proposals related to developing close relations with other United Nations bodies, including the General Assembly, the Disarmament Commission and the Security Council, as well as proposals for convening a Fourth Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD-IV) and the use of the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters or other entities in seeking advice for reform.

Enhancing linkages between disarmament organs

Considering today's situation, some have proposed enhancing the links between various organs of the disarmament machinery and ensuring complementarity in the work of these different bodies. One approach presented to the CD for re-establishing links could involve the CD allotting time in its early sessions to considering resolutions under the previous General Assembly, with ad hoc committees established to cover core agenda items taking into consideration the relevant resolutions.⁶¹ The CD could then seek to find common ground on the substance of resolutions with a view to moving towards negotiations.⁶² The Disarmament Commission for its part could evaluate resolutions passed in the First Committee and discuss specific CD topics⁶³ or, following a request from the CD via the General Assembly, potentially "explore a narrowly defined topic or even a specific kind of measure".⁶⁴

Interaction between the Disarmament Commission and First Committee Chairs

In the past, the Chair of the First Committee has been invited to speak in formal CD plenaries.⁶⁵ It has been proposed that a more systemic and structured process could be established in which "the Chair of the [Disarmament Commission] and the Chair of the [General Assembly] First Committee could be invited to discuss the resolutions and relevance of these institutions".⁶⁶

61 United Kingdom (2012), [CD/PV.1262](#), 14 June 2012.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 United States (2023), [CD/2323](#), 6 June 2023.

65 See, for example, New Zealand (2015), [CD/PV.1367](#), 2 September 2015.

66 United Kingdom (2013), [CD/PV.1289](#), 11 June 2013.

67 Brazil (2015), [CD/PV.1330](#), 20 January 2015.

Exploring synergies with the Security Council

In addition to developing better links with the Disarmament Commission and the First Committee, it has been proposed that States seeking to revitalize the CD should explore synergies between the work of the Conference and that undertaken by the Security Council.⁶⁷

High-level meetings on disarmament machinery

In September 2010, the United Nations organized a high-level meeting on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. The meeting provided an important opportunity to gather political impetus to revitalize the work of the CD and was followed up with the adoption of resolution A/C.1/65/L.34/Rev.1 requesting the inclusion of an agenda item on “Revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament” in the provisional agenda of its sixty-sixth session. Subsequently, several States have voiced support for an additional high-level meeting on the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament.⁶⁸

Convening a Fourth Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD-IV)

Three Special Sessions devoted to Disarmament (SSOD) have been convened under the auspices of the General Assembly. Recognizing the success of the first SSOD in 1978 in laying the foundations for disarmament issues, some States have expressed support for convening a Fourth Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD-IV).⁶⁹ Proponents of this proposal have suggested that an SSOD-IV would have the advantage of comprehensively considering the United Nations disarmament machinery in its entirety.

68 Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011; Slovenia (2011), [CD/PV.1211](#), 1 March 2011; Canada (2011), [CD/PV.1210](#), 28 February 2011.

69 G-21 (2010), [CD/1894](#), 14 September 2010; G-21 (2013), [CD/1958](#), 9 September 2013; Colombia (2021), [CD/1913](#), 30 June 2011; Pakistan (2010), [CD/PV.1194](#), 24 August 2010; Indonesia (2010), [CD/PV.1195](#), 31 August 2010; Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of G-21 (2010), [CD/PV.1196](#), 7 September 2010; India (2010), [CD/PV.1197](#), 14 September 2010; Islamic Republic of Iran (2011), [CD/PV.1207](#), 22 February 2011; Egypt (2020), [CD/PV.1533](#), 24 February 2020; Brazil (2014), [CD/PV.1303](#), 28 January 2014; Pakistan (2013), [CD/PV.1289](#), 11 June 2013; Malaysia (2012), [CD/PV.1262](#), 14 June 2012; Malaysia (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 August 2011; Pakistan (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 Aug 2011; Nigeria (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 August 2011; Indonesia on behalf of G-21 (2015) [CD/2030](#), 13 August 2015; Syrian Arab Republic on behalf of G-21(2012), [CD/1939](#), 28 August 2012.

Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Following the 2010 high-level meeting on revitalizing the work of the Conference and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations, in 2011 the Secretary-General tasked the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters “to undertake a thorough review of the issues raised at the high-level meeting”.⁷⁰ The Advisory Board considered the matter and produced several recommendations.⁷¹ Some States have subsequently proposed further utilizing the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters or a similar group of “eminent” or “wise persons” for recommendations and advice.⁷² The Board or group, it has been proposed, could be tasked to “study innovative ways of improving the situation” and revitalizing the United Nations disarmament machinery generally and the CD specifically.⁷³

70 Secretary-General (2011), [CD/PV.1199](#), 26 January 2011.

71 See United Nations (2011), [A/66/125](#), 11 July 2011.

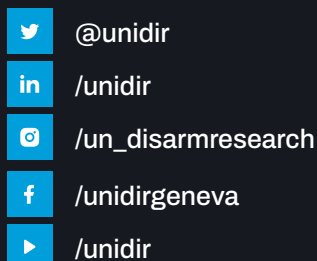
72 New Zealand (2010), [CD/PV.1200](#), 27 January 2011; Russian Federation (2012), [CD/PV.1247](#), 21 February 2012; Bangladesh (2012), [CD/PV.1248](#), 23 February 2012; Malaysia (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 August 2011; Malaysia (2011), [CD/PV.1231](#), 4 August 2011.

73 Russian Federation (2012), [CD/PV.1247](#), 21 February 2012.

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) has played a significant role in the negotiation of several major multilateral agreements that continue to contribute to global peace and security. More recently, however, negotiation in the CD has reached an impasse, leaving it unable to make progress on its agenda at a point of growing geopolitical tension.

To address this issue, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), with the support of France and Germany, organized a high-level retreat in Montreux, Switzerland, on 22–23 June 2023 to discuss ideas to revitalize the work of the CD and its relationship with the wider disarmament machinery.

Seventy-nine participants from 60 States (including 51 CD Member States and 9 States that have applied for Observer status to the CD) participated in the retreat in their personal capacity. This document provides a factual summary of the discussion in Montreux.



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