

**Framework Forum roundtable on the UN Open Ended Working Group
Saturday 24 August
Remarks by Mr. Jarmo Sareva, Director, Geneva Branch, UNODA**

- I take it that most of you are familiar with the rather comprehensive presentation I made on 16 May in the OEWG on the Secretary-General's five-point proposal on nuclear disarmament, and on the subsequent evolution of thinking in UNODA on this and some related issues.
- I won't repeat what I said at that time except to stress that the five-point proposal meant, in part, to offer a way out of the step-by-step vs. comprehensive approach conundrum. This was through advocating a more holistic approach, one avoiding any specific sequencing of steps, and based on simultaneous efforts on many fronts. As the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs has pointed out, in a holistic approach, the relationship between ends and means could be restored: the end – nuclear disarmament – would be clearer and means could then be tied to that end.
- The Secretary-General's proposal did not claim that a single nuclear weapons convention would be the only way to achieve global zero. However, it did mean that the alternative approach – a system of separate but mutually reinforcing instruments – should be predicated on such instruments actually advancing nuclear disarmament. In other words, there has to be a connection between the partial goal of each instrument and the collective goal of these instruments, as put together. This is something on which there needs to be absolute clarity, at all times.
- Now, the title of this panel refers to building political traction, with focus on engaging the NWS and their allies. The key issue here is political traction – creation of political will - and not the choice of venue, because without political will, no venue will succeed in advancing nuclear disarmament. I would add that with the NWS, one should refer to all nuclear weapon possessing States, and not merely the five States recognized by the NPT, the ones who have unfortunately chosen not to attend the work of the OEWG.
- These efforts should also encompass those nuclear have-nots aspiring – or suspected of aspiring – to nuclear status, as the expression of genuine political

will on their part can help remove obstacles to progress among the nuclear haves. As was pointed out by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs earlier this year, in both the Secretariat and among the vast majority of our Member States, there is a belief that the goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually reinforcing and must be pursued vigorously together, and that the “sequencing dilemma” is better to be bypassed entirely.

- Having said that, and noting that the lack of political will is often quoted as being the true reason behind the CD’s sad and long impasse, one must not use it as an excuse for inaction. Even if the lack of political will lies behind the impasse, that doesn’t make the impasse any less unacceptable. After all, we’re not talking about an act of God, but of the consequences of human decisions, or lack thereof.
- As Al Gore once said, in the context of discussing the climate change, the only other truly existential threat to humankind, “[w]e have everything we need to solve the climate problem except for political will. But political will is a renewable resource”. So even if it is unfortunate that we have everything we need to resolve the nuclear weapons problem except for political will, it can fortunately be generated.
- In this context, and against the backdrop of the long impasse in the CD, one may also ask whether it can be helpful to improve the functioning of the multilateral forums where nuclear disarmament is supposed to be discussed and, above all, negotiated. In my view, such improvements do matter – albeit in a limited and indirect fashion – as they can make it easier to create conditions for finding the missing political will. Human beings are often prisoners of the conditioning and learned behaviour instilled in them in the organizational setting where they operate, and changing and improving such settings can help them unlearn the learned – perhaps not to the extent of the conversion of Saul, when, to quote the Bible, “something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again”.
- So, if no such transformative conversions on the part of the current and aspiring NWS can be expected as a result of the improvement and perfection of our common disarmament machinery, what, then, can? What would make the scales fall from the eyes of the nuclear powers – and, I should remind, those of aspiring to such status – apart from a nuclear catastrophe?

- I already mentioned that nuclear weapons pose one of the two truly existential threats to humankind or at least to civilization as we know it. Fortunately, if we achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, the threat can be removed. With climate change, if action is not taken, a tipping point, one of no return, is eventually reached, after which it will be too late for any political traction to make a difference. With nuclear weapons, as long as they haven't been used, collective action can make a difference.

- So, back to removing the scales: as Dr. Johnson has said, "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully". However, as with climate change, there is a strong body of opinion in denial, or even actively advocating it, either because of a warped belief system or because of self-interest. As for the great majority, they may not be in outright denial, but nevertheless lack awareness of and interest in the twin subjects. The prospect of being hanged and, subsequently, a concentrated mind, are simply not there.

- That brings me to my first point, which, I admit, is obvious and may appear pedestrian. It is about the need to continue to raise awareness, and to fight mis- and disinformation. This can be painstakingly slow and will never amount to a conversion like that by Saul; yet, it is a foundation for creating the kind of grassroots momentum which can help build political traction. Civil society and parliamentarians have a key role in these efforts, as has disarmament and non-proliferation education.

- My second point is no less obvious but perhaps less popular. It is about the need to temper one's hopes for very rapid progress, even under the best of circumstances and strong grassroots support. Multilateral efforts among non-like-minded are by definition difficult, and I wouldn't readily prescribe a like-minded formula – an Ottawa or Oslo – in the nuclear area where you must have the nuclear haves onboard. This is in no way to diminish the historic accomplishments of these two treaties, where significant early progress has been made – upfront – among the like-minded through stockpile destruction, clearance and the hugely valuable work on victim assistance.

- Against this background, it is all too unfortunate that the NWS have so far chosen not to attend the work of the OEWG. My third and final point is that the future diplomatic efforts should aim at engaging the NWS. Leaving aside the possibility of the CD managing to agree on a programme of work with one

or more negotiating mandates – and such negotiations on an FMCT should, in order to be credible and politically acceptable, have both disarmament and non-proliferation dimension – the logical home for these future efforts would be in the United Nations. Despite its many flaws, the UN is still the only body with universal membership, which also gives it unique legitimacy.

- My advice, again with a disclaimer about the future of the CD, which I hope to be bright, would then be for the September 26 High-level Meeting to focus less on what divides us and more on the goal shared by all, which is a world without nuclear weapons. If the HLM becomes a venue for bashing the NWS, it will not bode well for possible future efforts to bring them into the OEWG, if the Group gets a renewed mandate for 2014.
- I would also like to see the HLM focus less on what can easily appear as tired political slogans of yesteryear, and concentrate more on establishing a practical roadmap for the future. If it would rise to this occasion, it could send a highly useful message and inputs to this fall's session of the First Committee. Way too often, the high-level meetings held in the margins of the General Assembly amount to flashes in the pan, practically forgotten by the time the blue NYPD barricades along the First Avenue are removed.
- However, for the HLM and the First Committee to deliver, the OEWG itself must convince the Member States that it can continue to add value. That is something that is in the hands of the members of the Group, and in their hands only.