

72<sup>nd</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST COMMITTEE

**Statement during Thematic Discussion on  
Disarmament Machinery**

**Mr. Jarmo Sareva**

**Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research**

**New York, 24 October 2017**



Excellences, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the third time that I have had the privilege of joining this thematic discussion representing UNIDIR. Having been both Chairman and Secretary of this Committee, to join this panel as a representative of the only research institute devoted to research in the area of disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation and related international security issues in the UN system is of particular personal importance to me.

Let me start by what usually comes at the very end of statements like this.

UN staff members are every so often described as the Organization's "most important resource" by Secretaries-General and by other senior management. And they are absolutely right. Let me therefore start by acknowledging and thanking my colleagues at UNIDIR. They are not only the Institute's most important resource—they are the resource of UNIDIR.

It is indeed thanks to the dedication and commitment of our staff, and the continued high quality of their work, that UNIDIR has been able to stay in business. Without them, no amount of fundraising would have mattered, and pleas for political support would have fallen on deaf ears. The supportive working environment in UNIDIR has also amazed me: everybody pitches in and shows flexibility when necessary. In a small institute, which operates in an environment with frequent, suddenly arising contingencies, this is a recipe that truly helps.

I concluded my statement last year by noting that an institute like UNIDIR will always be only as good and as attractive to our current and potential funders as the quality of our most recent substantive work—it is our reputation. In other words, we are constantly held accountable. And this is one of our strengths. With a highly competent and dedicated staff, we have been able to deliver, and our reputation remains solid. It has been a privilege to work with them.

Mr. Chairman,

My report on the activities of the Institute for the period from January to December 2016 and the proposed programme of work and financial plan for 2017 and 2018 can be found in document A/72/154. It contains an exhaustive list of our projects and activities in 2016 and during the first several months of 2017. A more exhaustive description, including all project reports and other

publications as well as audio recordings of most of our events, appears on our website [www.unidir.org](http://www.unidir.org) or [www.unidir.ch](http://www.unidir.ch). I would encourage those who haven't done so to acquaint themselves with our website and make use of its resources.

I would now draw your attention to Chapter II of my report, which briefly describes UNIDIR's research agenda or "road map" as it can also be described. It was developed subsequent to a process of stakeholder consultations and reflection on our research objectives and activities as a contribution to UNIDIR's 2017-2020 strategic planning exercise. Let me briefly explain the rationale behind coming up with this agenda.

At present, UNIDIR organizes its work into five programmes: Weapons of mass destruction, Emerging security issues, Conventional weapons, Security and society, and Disarmament machinery. As it may not always be evident how our projects and activities fit together, and as some themes of our research or specific research questions may intersect different programmes, it has not always been easy to describe them only in the context of those individual programmes.

We also felt that a research agenda could more clearly signal the Institute's research objectives and its work toward them, and thus strengthen UNIDIR's case for funding some projects it has identified as being of particular value or priority. Finally, we felt that a research agenda could have an important communicative role to our funders, other stakeholders and our governing body, the Secretary-General's Advisory Board, which also acts as our Board of Trustees.

Let me stress that the research agenda is not meant to bind the Institute's choices about which research to undertake down the line if it is felt that those choices would better fulfil the aims of our Mandate under those circumstances, or because of resource constraints. We will be revisiting the research agenda's thematic priorities, and take into account the experiences of research staff.

Mr. Chairman,

I note in my report that UNIDIR's administrative and financial footing is more stable than it has been for some time. However, I also note we cannot take this stability for granted in the high-cost environment of the United Nations system. The need to ensure UNIDIR's long-term operational sustainability while maintaining its autonomy persists. I must stress with concern that while we have continued to do very well in mobilizing earmarked resources for projects UNIDIR continues to face an increasingly challenging environment in financing the institutional framework necessary to undertake project activities in compliance with the rules, regulations and requirements of the United Nations. States are increasingly unable to contribute to the institutional operations budget or funding not limited to implementation or duration of a specific project or activity.

This trend has been particularly pronounced this year, when un-earmarked funding to our Institutional Operations Budget is—so far—falling substantially below last year's figures. I wish to point out that any end-of-year "surplus" appearing in our financial statements mostly reflects activities that we have already committed to undertake the following year. For example, the surplus noted in annex II table 1 of my report for the year 2016 amounts to MUS\$ 1,102, but 81% of that surplus indicated is earmarked for activities to be undertaken in 2017.

It is against this background that I wish to recall resolution 70/69, the quinquennial First Committee UNIDIR resolution, adopted on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Institute two years ago. In operative paragraph 9 of that consensus resolution, adopted following protracted informal consultations and reflecting a delicate compromise, the General Assembly called for an exceptional one-off regular budget funding proposal for UNIDIR for the biennium 2018-2019.

Those of you who were present at the time of the adoption of that Resolution in the First Committee recall that in an oral statement made by the then High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, the Committee was informed that an internal assessment would be carried out in 2016 to inform that funding proposal. That assessment subsequently concluded that a core staff of four was deemed appropriate for UNIDIR's essential institutional element.

On the basis of the internal assessment, the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for 2018-2019 includes a resource request towards increase of the regular budget subvention, as a one-time measure to help preserve the future of the Institute in line with the request made by the General Assembly in operative paragraph 9 of resolution 70/69. This request was strongly endorsed by UNIDIR's Board of Trustees at its meeting in June this year. I'm also very pleased that the UN's Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) has endorsed the increase not once but twice.

The request is now in front of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly as part of its consideration of the biennial budget proposal for 2018-19. While that Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters, it is not all that usual for it to un-endorse the ACABQ's recommendations. Any action taken in that regard by the Fifth Committee based on what is an illusory surplus in UNIDIR's accounts would, against the backdrop of a continued downward trend in institutional funding, go against the compromise reached in 2015.

As you also recall, paragraph 10 of resolution 70/69 requested the Secretary-General to commission an assessment by an independent third party with a mandate to prepare a report on the future structural, financial, administrative and operational aspects of the Institute, outlining a sustainable and stable funding structure and operating model as required to achieve the mandate and objectives of the Institute beyond the biennium 2018-2019, and to report in this regard, taking into account the aforementioned assessment, to the Assembly at its seventy-third session. The additional resource requirements for the external assessment are also included in the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget.

For the independent third party assessment to be able to properly inform the report requested from the Secretary-General, it will have to be carried out early in 2018, and concluded no later than mid-spring next year. The General Assembly may then wish to take action based on the two reports. It is hoped that such action will ensure a sustainable and stable funding structure and operating model for UNIDIR, as requested in resolution 70/69. At the same time, I must reiterate that the one-time measure mandated by that resolution and included in the proposed programme budget is necessary to help preserve the Institute's short-term future as requested in paragraph 9 of the resolution. I would remind you once again that operative paragraphs 9 and 10 were adopted as a package, as a result of a compromise reached in the informal consultations.

I have dwelled at such length on UNIDIR's subvention and the Secretary-General's request for its increase because to say that it greatly matters for UNIDIR is an understatement. This is an extremely important issue for the Institute, one for which we have worked very hard with our friends and supporters during the past three years. I hope that when you have a chance to discuss the matter with your distinguished colleagues in the Fifth Committee, you make a case for ensuring UNIDIR's future as called for by Resolution 70/69, and as endorsed by the ACABQ.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by raising one more issue and that is partnerships. The reason for highlighting it is the fact that enhanced partnerships are every so often prescribed to us as an alternative business model—primarily to cut costs. There is sometimes a misconception that we do not actively pursue partnerships, or that we pursue them only with a geographically limited number of partners.

UNIDIR does not carry out research for research's sake. What we rather do is to fulfil our mandate by providing fact-based analysis—including on emerging issues—and offering new ideas for making progress on a range of peace and security issues that relate to disarmament. We act as a convener and facilitator in multilateral disarmament-related matters. In short, through our research and related activities, we assist the international community in improving its disarmament and security policies, programmes and practices.

Any partnerships that we enter into must serve these very ends. And, to do so, they must be flexible and provide concrete added value to our projects and activities. To be successful, a partnership requires a firm commitment and a lot of work from both sides. Standing MoUs can easily become a dead letter or—worse—a burden. Ad hoc arrangements usually work much better.

Some Member States see partnerships as the way to go in order to cut costs and to lighten UNIDIR's footprint in Geneva. This could however easily result in UNIDIR rubber-stamping work by national research institutes, and would further limit the Institute's capacity to carry out the pro bono consultative and advisory services that Member States greatly appreciate and expect of us. It also fails to recognize that UNIDIR has never been, and today is even less about, turning out research papers that can be easily commissioned from the outside. UNIDIR's unique position within the UN system provides it with the kind of access that national research entities do not have.

As for the number of UNIDIR's partnerships, I would just note that in 2017, our Conventional Arms Programme alone has partnered so far with a total of 76 entities. These include governments, UN system entities, NGOs and international organizations. A great number of them come from or operate in the global south. To give an example, five out of the thirteen governments we have worked with are in Africa: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Somalia and South Sudan. Among the UN system entities, the single biggest group are those in the field.

Finally, I would like to recognize the highly fruitful cooperation that we have had with UNODA. The last few years have been particularly good—this includes collaboration on substantive studies and UNIDIR's role as UNODA's institutional consultant in a number of Groups of Governmental Experts. We look forward to a continuation and strengthening of this mutually beneficial relationship in the coming years.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

■