

Opening Remarks
H.E. Ms. Arundhati Ghose
Chairperson
Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters
30 January 2002

Mr. Under-Secretary-General, fellow Board members, Mr. Wang, Patricia, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me, at the outset, thank the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General, for having offered me the privilege and honour of the Chairmanship of the Board for this year. I can only promise to try and see that the discussions proceed as smoothly as possible and, hopefully, that the Board will come up with relevant and useful advice for the Secretary-General in accordance with our mandate.

Let me first extend a warm welcome to Mr. Xiaoyu Wang, our new Secretary. From what I have seen of him in this short period, he is bound to be of immense help not only to the Board as a whole, but also to the Chairman, for which I am already deeply grateful.

I must also say that we miss the indefatigable Randy Rydell and would like to send him our best wishes, as also to Michael Cassandra, our firefighter and *eminence grise*. I would also like to welcome to the Board our new members, some of whom have been prevailed upon to concretely contribute to our deliberations, even before their first formal meeting: Ms. Jill Sinclair from Canada, Mrs. Mariama Bayard Gamatié from Niger, Ambassador Kongit Sinegiorgis from Ethiopia who, unfortunately, is unable to be with us at this session, and Ambassador Gelson Fonseca, Jr. of Brazil. As you will see from their CVs, which have been circulated, they all come to us with impeccable credentials and will, I am sure, make significant contributions to our deliberations.

We are meeting in a changed world. I would like to share some personal thoughts with you on the situation, as I see it.

What made September 11 such a turning point? Other countries have been suffering the scourge of terrorism before, as has been the U.S. itself. In my view, it is because even the most technologically advanced, economically successful and militarily powerful country in the world was attacked by a relatively unrecognized group of persons, using instruments of peace, civilian aircraft, turning them, in some twisted mindset, into weapons of mass destruction. The subsequent revelations of the global reach of these organizations, their international networking, their access to not only the facilities offered by the international financial system, but also to sophisticated technology and international communications systems, have made all countries and societies vulnerable.

Since we last met, when the Board had expressed its regret at the stalemated multilateral discussions on disarmament, events which would appear to have changed the very parameters of our discussions – from the foreboding to the real – have, in my view, added an urgency to our work and a need, I believe, to bring together all our efforts to tackle a most perilous phenomenon, posing as dire a threat to international peace and security as any that the world has faced. I, therefore, really agreed with the choice of the agenda items you now have before you, as I feel we should be able to at least start a coherent discussion on these issues, with perhaps, some recommendations to the Secretary-General, on the role the UN could play in dealing with this situation. Individual countries may, in the short term, be able to deal with specific cases of incidents of terrorism, but the inchoate, octopus-like growth makes the world before September 11 seem an orderly world, controllable by obligations undertaken by States, through regimes and treaties. There is a global threat, to each country and to all of us collectively, that can only be countered if we act together. The UN cannot solve all individual, local conflicts, but it can and, I believe, must, fight this alien invasion as the only organization that has the capability to do so.

Unfortunately, with all that the UN and the Security Council have done, there is still a stalemate on the definition of terrorism. The time lost in this debate, is time gained by the terrorists. For the international community, while legal instruments are being negotiated, we should be able to agree on a broad definition, at least to set norms of behaviour. Any person or group using violence, particularly against civilians, for political ends, which terrorizes societies for their political ends or to blackmail democratic Governments into meeting their political demands, such persons or groups should be labelled terrorists, and the might of the international community should, through the UN, be brought to bear to control, if not to eliminate these groups. The exchange of information on laws to deal with these threats may be one of the unique contributions of the UN.

We are aware of the fact that the UN has been involved in helping the people of Afghanistan long before the current conflict, through humanitarian aid and through a grossly under-funded mine clearance programme. The efforts were clearly not in vain, as when it became necessary, it was the UN which assisted in setting up the interim Government in Kabul, and now, facilitating the calling of the Loya Jirga to elect the future Government. The Secretary-General's recent visit to Kabul and his impressions of the developments, the donor meeting in Tokyo, are essential to our understanding of what is an ongoing process.

Nonetheless, the concomitant dangers are real: access to weapons of mass destruction by terrorist organizations, in however crude a form, is a frightening reality. Our approach to small arms as well, their export by their manufacturers without any check which allows them to find their way through the international arms bazaar into the hands of these very groups. I sincerely hope that we can discuss some of these aspects, during this session. I do not at all wish to give the impression that by focusing on the global terrorist threat from non-State actors, we should not address the issues of the continued existence of nuclear weapons; their existence is leading, I believe, to

asymmetric responses, complicating efforts to bring about a more stable world, in which we can concentrate on the urgent needs of our societies, in cooperation, to promote mutual well-being and prosperity. These issues will have to be addressed, and the pressures built up so painfully over the decades must not be allowed to be dissipated or diverted.

We will have to decide what we wish to do about the issue of reducing nuclear dangers and RMA. There is no directive from the UNGA that has been sent to us by the Secretary-General. It is for the Board to decide whether we just let things slide, or whether we should schedule discussions, either at this session or in July. I would suggest that we look at this issue on the first of February, after the NGO briefing, if that is agreeable to the Board. Proceeding to agenda item 2, adoption of the agenda, would the Board approve the agenda as contained in CRP.1?

Turning now to agenda item 3, may I request the Under-Secretary-General to address the Board, informing us, hopefully, of the actions taken by the Secretary-General and the Security Council in the current situation.

I will now give the floor to our Secretary to make some important and urgent administrative announcements, especially for our new members.

* * * * *