

Statement before the Disarmament Commission

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, I begin by congratulating you and your bureau and by pledging the total co-operation and support of the substantive department servicing this body -- the Department of Disarmament Affairs (the DDA) -- in your stewardship of the affairs of this Commission. I appreciate being provided this opportunity of addressing the Commission at its first session.

Global norms -- especially disarmament norms -- are not created overnight. They emerge from a painstaking process of deliberation, consensus-building, and negotiation. As the General Assembly's subsidiary organ mandated to consider and make recommendations on disarmament issues, the Disarmament Commission (UNDC) plays an important role in this evolutionary process of building global disarmament norms. It identifies general principles and suggests concrete measures needed to achieve them. Its record, therefore, must be judged within this larger context of norm-building -- for this is the Commission's *métier*, its special contribution to the Charter's goals of international peace and security.

The activities of the UNDC are most significant not for what they reveal about the persisting disagreements among Member States, but for the light they shed on the basic objectives that unite all such states. The differences that do arise only underscore the need for a deliberative forum like the UNDC to continue this difficult but edifying process of forging global disarmament norms. There is, I believe, a symbiotic relationship among the various bodies that comprise the present UN architecture for the deliberation and negotiation of disarmament. Each body plays its part in the grand design laid down in the Final Declaration of the First Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD-I).

The UNDC has been able to adapt its working methods to meet changing circumstances and needs -- at the beginning of the decade and, most recently, last year. In June 1998 the UNDC decided to streamline its agenda further so that it would normally comprise two substantive items per year, including one on nuclear disarmament. The Commission retained the possibility of adding a third item if there were consensus -- as is, in fact, the case at the present session. Over the years, the UNDC has elaborated guidelines that have marked out

common ground on many sensitive issues, including international arms transfers and regional disarmament. These texts have contributed to the subsequent consideration of related subjects by the UNDC itself and other bodies -- they have contributed, in short, to norm-building.

The General Assembly has asked the Commission to continue deliberating and to reach conclusions on some of the most stubborn problems on the international security agenda today. Some of these are problems that have vexed our diplomatic predecessors -- and have driven a few observers to become cynics about the prospects for achieving global disarmament norms and the role of the United Nations in fostering and maintaining such norms. It is therefore a credit to the institution of the UNDC that the General Assembly has charged it with the important tasks that it will perform in the weeks ahead. These relate to three key issues on which the General Assembly would like to have responses.

Issues

¶ The first issue before the UNDC concerns the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. The General Assembly has been discussing them since 1956. The right to establish such zones is explicitly recognized in Article VII of the NPT. Last December, the General Assembly adopted several resolutions endorsing the establishment of additional nuclear-weapon-free zones, including a resolution welcoming the declaration by Mongolia of its nuclear-weapon-free status. The chairman's working paper of Working Group I notes that such zones represent more than half the Earth's land mass, a tribute to the tenacity of a durable global norm, the norm of nuclear disarmament.

The working paper also notes that such zones help to "strengthen the security" of their Member States and should be based on arrangements freely arrived at among such states, taking into account all the relevant characteristics of the region concerned. The UN can assist states in establishing such zones -- the DDA is doing so now in the case of the Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone. A treaty text is now under discussion by states in the region.

Nuclear-weapon-free-zones are freely pursued by non-nuclear-weapon states as a deliberate form of affirmative action to protect themselves from the dangers of nuclear weapons. From the Treaty of Tlatelolco in 1968 to the Treaty of Bangkok in 1995, four inhabited regions of the world covering 114 countries are now free of nuclear weapons. These nuclear-weapon-free zones have varying prohibitions and arrangements for their defence against the danger of nuclear weapons. They have steadily shrunk the global area where nuclear weapons may be manufactured, stored, or deployed.

Further deliberation is needed on specific purposes, principles, and guidelines for establishing such zones. The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other regions such as in the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Europe remains a daunting challenge for international

diplomacy. On the other hand, the alarming nightmares that would accompany a world of many "nuclear-weapons-full" zones should be enough of an inducement for further progress by all countries in pursuit of the global nuclear disarmament norm.

· Turning now to the next item on the agenda, I note that this is the Commission's fourth year of deliberations over the proposal for a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Though agreement on the objectives and agenda for SSOD-IV has so far proven elusive, the persistence and depth of the world community's support for convening such a session is clear.

Introduced by South Africa -- on behalf of the members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries -- and adopted last December without a vote, Resolution 53/77 AA recorded the General Assembly's decision to convene such a special session, subject to the emergence of a consensus on its objectives and agenda. This resolution underscored the high priority that the General Assembly attaches to disarmament as a fundamental and continuing concern of the United Nations. Disarmament continues to be perceived as a global "public good" with profound implications affecting the activities of virtually the entire UN organization.

It has been 21 years since SSOD-I produced its Final Document which remains the high watermark of multilateral consensus on disarmament issues. It has also been 11 years since the last special session on disarmament, SSOD-III. At the cusp of the 21st Century and a new millennium, there is an urgent need for a commonly-agreed set of goals and strategies to achieve them. Epochal changes have been taking place in international relations. Fresh challenges have emerged. New forces are in action. They all have to be woven into a new multilateral disarmament order. Failure to do so has so far led to widespread concern. Over the last decade, we have witnessed numerous conferences on many of the global challenges -- conferences whose results have contributed to the evolution of a web of new rights and duties. Disarmament must find its place in this ongoing process.

The grounds for the General Assembly's decision to convene an SSOD-IV are well founded. A short list of significant challenges that lie ahead would have to include weapons of mass destruction, the excessive build-up and trade in conventional arms, regional proliferation threats, missile tests, implications from the deployment of national missile defense systems, the never-ending qualitative improvements in weapons systems, and illicit trafficking in small arms manufactured to military specifications. All of these developments profoundly affect prospects for peace, sustainable development, improvements in human security, and even a healthy environment. It is precisely these sweeping effects of unfettered armament that add urgency to the call for a new special session on disarmament.

The critical decisions on disarmament ultimately remain a matter for the Member States to decide, in this Commission and in other fora. When the proposal to convene an SSOD-IV is considered, it may be necessary at this early stage to be modest and to confine the discussion

to the terms of the resolution. To attempt to negotiate end results when the Commission is required by the General Assembly to "*promote agreement on the agenda and timing of the special session*" would put the cart before the horse.

The Commission will also consider proposed guidelines on conventional arms control, limitation, and disarmament, with particular emphasis on the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures. The effort to craft such guidelines and mobilize support for them deserves special recognition, in particular the work by the Group of Interested States, chaired by Germany.

The world community has clearly decided that it will no longer turn a blind eye to the costs that small arms and light weapons are imposing on human security and sustainable development. The Secretary-General stated in his last Report on the Work of the Organization (A/53/1) that 90 per cent of those killed or wounded in conflicts involving light military weapons are civilians and that 80 per cent of those are women and children. In his report on the causes of conflict in Africa (A/52/871), he concluded that improvements in transparency -- particularly with respect to the activities of international arms merchants -- would do more to combat the flow of illicit arms into Africa than any other single initiative.

The concept of "practical disarmament measures" is a relatively new political initiative to deal with these wide-ranging challenges from conventional arms. It first appeared on the agenda of the General Assembly in 1996 and has enjoyed a consensus ever since. Resolution 53/77 M -- introduced by Germany and adopted last December by the General Assembly without a vote -- encouraged the UNDC to continue its efforts aimed at the adoption of such guidelines in 1999.

The underlying approach gives the Secretary-General a broad mandate to respond directly to specific requests for assistance by member states in the field of disarmament. This assistance is often required to address numerous problems arising out of post-conflict situations, including demobilization, integration of former combatants into civil society; weapons collection and destruction programmes; the exchange of information; and other such activities.

Small arms -- while not in themselves the causes of wars or civil conflict -- are nonetheless raising a number of difficult problems for international peace and security. These problems are aggravated by the lack of reliable data on the production and sale of such arms, coupled with the growing lethality of such weapons and their easy availability on both the open and black markets.

Last December, the General Assembly also adopted, without a vote, a resolution on illicit traffic in small arms (A/RES/53/77 T). This resolution requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on this issue addressing the problem, possible solutions, and identifying roles for the United Nations. Together, these resolutions constitute strong evidence of the world community's concern over these problems. They also demonstrate high confidence in the UN's

expertise and the role of the Secretary-General in developing new initiatives to address such problems.

Last year, the DDA -- with the support of the Group of Interested States -- organized a training program in Cameroon on practical disarmament measures, and a workshop in Guatemala, which focused on problems of integrating combatants into civil society. The Department and the UN Development Programme are also jointly assisting the Government of Albania in the collection of weapons from the civilian population in return for development incentives.

Though each project was a unique response to unique circumstances, all practical disarmament measures work from the premise that the problems of weapons collection and the integration of combatants into civil society cannot adequately be addressed in isolation of their underlying political conflicts and socio-economic conditions. The re-vitalization of the DDA's regional centres for peace and disarmament in Lima and Lome respond to the need to approach these issues from a regional and local perspective.

The DDA -- through its chairmanship of Coordinating Action on Small Arms (CASA) -- is also working to ensure the consistency of the UN's diverse efforts to address the global threats posed by the excessive accumulation and misuse of small arms. Members of CASA agree on the need to enhance public awareness and to support measures within civil society to prevent armed conflicts and violence involving such weapons.

It is encouraging that the General Assembly adopted Resolution 53/77 E calling for an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects, which the Government of Switzerland has offered to host not later than 2001.

Advocacy of these practical disarmament measures need not interfere with or compromise the inherent right of self defence nor need such measures detract attention from nuclear disarmament. To the contrary, such measures promote both world peace and development -- they constitute an issue with auspicious prospects for North/South cooperation. It is highly appropriate therefore that the Disarmament Commission will seek now to develop a consensus around further initiatives that may be taken in the growing field of the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures.

Other Business

As you may be aware, the UN Secretariat is in the process of preparing the medium-term plan for the period 2002-2005. The medium-term plan is the principal policy directive of the United Nations -- it reflects Member States' priorities and describes the overall orientation of the Organization's programmes. The plan indicates the broad approach or strategy of each programme in pursuit of the mandates set by the Charter and by the General Assembly, including its special sessions.

The General Assembly has requested that the medium-term plan proposals be reviewed by the relevant intergovernmental bodies prior to submission to the UN programme and budgetary bodies. Accordingly, the DDA has asked that the proposed programme for disarmament be placed on the UNDC agenda under "Other Business." In accordance with budgetary procedures, the Department will submit the proposed plan to the Committee on Programme and Coordination in June 2000, and thereafter to the relevant main Committees of the General Assembly. The Department is pleased to submit this plan for review by the Commission.

I would also like to take this opportunity today to inform all delegations that the DDA is organizing a symposium on "Missile Development and the Impact on Global Security," which will be held on 22 April in Conference Room 4. This will be an informal overview and discussion by some visiting international experts on a wide range of problems relating to missile proliferation, missile defense, export controls, and development. It is one of a series of such symposia organized by the Department and we will be circulating additional details shortly.

Conclusion

Achievements with respect to disarmament have, I believe, lagged far behind the progress that has come with the advent of sustainable development. Like development, disarmament is also a process -- one that must be sustained over many years, pursued in many venues, and open to contributions from all countries and groups throughout civil society.

The deliberations of the Disarmament Commission contribute to this ongoing process of achieving "*sustainable disarmament*" -- the natural complement to the process of sustainable development. Disarmament without development would be about as ephemeral as prosperity in a world armed to the teeth with weapons that can destroy the very basis of life on Earth. Let us heed, therefore, what history and logic tell us about the prerequisites for a more peaceful and prosperous world.

There is -- to be sure -- much in the world that might lead one to despair over the future of disarmament. One need only note the continuing deadlock on strategic nuclear disarmament, the events in South Asia in May 1998, reported increases in defense budgets, and new outbreaks of armed conflicts and new civilian casualties well after the end of the Cold War. Even within the UN system, we must note the travails of the Conference on Disarmament in reaching agreement on a programme of work; disputes within the NPT Preparatory Committee meetings; and chronic financial constraints on all UN activities, to name just a few challenges.

Yet the future of disarmament may not be so dim after all, since it appeals directly both to the self-interests and ideals of all the peoples of the United Nations. It has weathered worse storms. Efforts from civil society on behalf of disarmament will continue unabated despite

these obstacles. So must the work of the Disarmament Commission. The stakes are too big for any other alternative.