

# 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 full co-operation and substantive support of the Department of Disarmament Affairs for your efforts throughout the important deliberations ahead. I appreciate this opportunity to address the Commission at its first plenary meeting of the new millennium -- on a date that also marks the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco.

In his opening remarks on 24 April to the 2000 Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned that much of the established multilateral disarmament machinery has started to rust. He

said that this condition was due not to any inherent flaw in the machinery itself but to the apparent lack of political will to use it. A month before, in issuing his Millennium Report, the Secretary-General stressed that “the United Nations was intended to introduce new principles into international relations, making a qualitative difference to their day-to-day conduct.”

These observations frame the proper context within which we must begin our deliberations today. For I am confident that this Commission will have no problems with either rust or obsolescence if its members never lose sight of the collective interests that bind all nations, including the most universal interest of all, the survival of our planet in an age of rapid political and technological change. History is replete with examples of institutions that have failed due to the ascendancy and ultimate triumph of parochial national interests over the common good of humankind. Bitter tragedies all too often result from maximalist approaches to national security, including the pursuit of regional or international supremacy. Such approaches typically are pursued at the expense of common security and set the stage for arms races that can impoverish entire nations.

Our task, therefore, must be to learn from this history. We must re-dedicate ourselves to the collective solution of some of the gravest problems on the international security agenda. As the Secretary-General has suggested, we must re-affirm our joint commitment to make a genuine qualitative difference as a result of our work. The goal here is not simply to produce a paper consensus, but to discover paths to solve concrete problems in an all-too real world. We must in particular build some momentum behind solutions that can be constructively pursued elsewhere in the UN disarmament machinery, ultimately the Conference on Disarmament.

## **The 2000 Agenda of the UNDC**

The first issue on this year’s agenda concerns ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament, a priority that dates back not just to the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly in 1978, but to the first General Assembly resolution which was approved in 1946 in the shadows of two deadly atomic clouds. Given the horrendous human and environmental effects from the detonation of even one nuclear weapon, the world community has rightfully placed nuclear disarmament at the top of the global security agenda. There is no need for this priority to be re-confirmed by the stimulus of yet another detonation.

Circumstances should be favorable for additional progress in this area. At the last NPT Review Conference, the nuclear-weapon states made an unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament. This follows a decade-long trend of gradual reductions in the reported or estimated holdings of these -- these most dangerous of all -- weapons of mass destruction. By some indications the stockpiles have dropped by about half in this period, while efforts are underway to improve the physical security

and accountancy controls over the considerable stocks of weapons and materials that remain.

Some states with nuclear weapons have even started the difficult process of lifting the various veils that had long shrouded their weapons programmes. This is seen in the release of new information about the costs of acquiring and maintaining these arsenals, the gross number of weapons and related nuclear materials produced by some countries, and the environmental effects and clean-up budgets, to name a few important subjects.

Though much greater progress must be made in all these areas, credit is due for the enlightened efforts of some states to make such pioneering first steps into this all-too unfamiliar terrain of genuine public accountability -- an essential element of "good governance." Even in the field of nuclear testing -- and despite the setbacks in South Asia two years ago or the obstacles facing early entry into force of the CTBT -- the moratorium on nuclear testing has held up and, if reason prevails, will last until such tests are finally outlawed both everywhere and forever.

There are, to be sure, many problems ahead relating to both to the remaining weapons themselves and to the ideas and doctrines contrived to rationalize their continued production, modernization, and use. The Cold War nuclear doctrine of "mutual assured destruction" -- though less emphasized today at the global level -- has evolved into a multiplicity of what are called "minimum nuclear deterrence" strategies. Deterrence, it seems, has produced somewhat of a "demonstration effect," as additional countries have come to use adjectives like "essential" and "vital" to characterize such arms.

Hence a tragic irony: nuclear weapons possessed by some countries beget nuclear weapons pursuits by other countries, which in turn provides new pretexts for the original possessor states to defer concrete nuclear disarmament initiatives pending the emergence of a more peaceful or stable world order. This is a recipe for perpetual global disorder.

Because of its urgency and complexity, the challenge of global nuclear disarmament demands immediate attention. It cannot be consigned to the never-never land of "ultimate goals." Nor can it be conditioned by the prior achievement of general and complete disarmament, a linkage that fails to acknowledge any strategic -- let alone moral -- distinction between a nuclear warhead and an AK-47. Difficult problems relating to transparency, irreversibility, de-alerting, verification, and enforcement all remain not only unsolved, but are in many cases not yet even on the table for serious multilateral deliberations. Among the most challenging is the need to craft practical solutions to the problem of building the level of mutual trust needed to achieve the disarmament goal, and the problem of ensuring that disarmament will be sustained by strong institutional support and political will.

While recognizing the enormity of these challenges, let us not forget that billions of diverse peoples throughout the United Nations comprise a reservoir of support for nuclear disarmament. What they are demanding are not palliatives merely to reduce the danger of future nuclear wars. They want to eliminate nuclear threats, not simply to manage them.

In short, they want this Commission -- along with other institutions throughout the UN disarmament machinery, relevant regional organizations, and their own national governments -- to get on with the difficult work that lies ahead, not find new excuses for inaction or complacency. Its deliberations must therefore focus on the elaboration of concrete actions that will be necessary to implement agreed norms. The fact that we have come so far is itself an enormous achievement.

The original Disarmament Commission, many will recall, emerged in 1952 after the dissolution of the UN Atomic Energy Commission and the UN Commission for Conventional Armaments. It is fitting, therefore, that the Commission's 2000 agenda would cover both nuclear disarmament and practical confidence-building measures (CBMs) in the field of conventional arms.

The First Committee has long recognized the importance of CBMs in enhancing international peace and security. For example, eleven of the disarmament-related resolutions approved by the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly made some reference to CBMs, not including other resolutions that address nuclear weapons issues. They are cited in reference to -- the objective reporting of information on military matters; the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures; transparency in armaments (2 resolutions); regional disarmament; regional confidence-building measures with respect to activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa; the work of the UN Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean; the strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region; and the stability and development of South-Eastern Europe.

As was the case with nuclear weapons, the record with respect to conventional arms control over the last decade also includes some good news. There were definite trends downward both in the aggregate size of defence budgets and in the volume of arms transfers. The Commission added to this progress by reaching a consensus last year on guidelines on conventional arms control, limitation, and disarmament, with particular emphasis on the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures. Hard work is now underway in preparation for the 2001 Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Others are studying the possibility of developing further the UN Register on Conventional Arms.

Meanwhile, regional efforts are seeking to improve controls over the excess stockpiling or illicit sale of a diverse array of conventional weaponry. In Albania, I witnessed first hand the importance of the de-weaponization of a society, where the voluntary surrender and destruction of excess arms has been combined with community development incentives to produce confidence-building dividends for the country at large.

Another noteworthy achievement in this area was the conclusion last year of the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. More than 70,000 pieces of Treaty-limited equipment have been destroyed under the CFE Treaty and its associated documents, and thousands of on-site inspections have been conducted. The treaty has substantially increased both the transparency and predictability of military forces in Europe, a region that knows all too well the consequences of general conventional war. Efforts to restrict illicit trafficking in firearms in the Americas and the ECOWAS moratorium on small arms in West Africa offer additional illustrations of constructive steps that are underway to reduce both the incidence and consequences of war.

It is not surprising that these and other such efforts have generated worldwide interest in improving national and multilateral efforts to reduce the human and economic costs of unrestrained arms competition. Yet the challenges ahead are truly enormous. There are already some warning signs that the military retrenchment following the end of the Cold War may now be giving way to some alarming new trends dictated both by demand-side and supply-side pressures. On June 14, in announcing publication of its 2000 Yearbook, SIPRI reported that global arms expenditures have once again started to rise. According to their analysis --

*“the total world military expenditure increased by 2.1% in real terms in 1999 and amounted to roughly \$780 billion. While this is almost one-third less than 10 years earlier, it still represents a significant share of world economic resources: 2.6% of world gross national product (GNP).”*

This is an ominous sign indeed, especially in light of the qualitative improvements that are underway in all kinds of conventional weaponry. Though the total volume of international conventional arms trade is still reportedly stable, there seems little question that the mobility, lethality, and accuracy of conventional weapons systems may be advancing faster than existing controls can reasonably regulate. Some countries export arms to achieve expedient political goals that have little to do with national defence. Others continue to produce arms not just for national defence purposes but also to reap bountiful commercial opportunities, a point underscored on 21 June in a UN symposium co-hosted by the Department of Disarmament Affairs on “Restructuring of the Global Arms Industry and Its Implications.”

Further complicating matters, the forces of globalization have for many years been

shaping both the production and distribution of arms, even to the point where the definition of what precisely constitutes an “arms export” becomes blurred and problematic. Several major arms producers or consumers are also continuing to reduce their Cold War-era arms stocks by sending their surpluses off to market. The addition of diamonds and drugs as means of financing illicit arms deals adds further complexity to the challenges ahead, a point stressed in a report issued last week by the World Bank on the economic causes of civil conflict.

Surely further progress in the field of conventional arms control will depend heavily upon the fate of diplomacy and ongoing efforts to achieve the peaceful settlement of disputes. This only underscores further the need for confidence-building measures, which are needed not just to restrain or prevent arms races but also to help in alleviating the underlying political or economic forces that feed such races.

Among the various practical confidence-building measures that might be considered there is the provision of advisory assistance to Member States, at their request, in safeguarding and improving control over their surplus or obsolete weapons stockpiles, particularly with regard to those storage facilities housing small arms and light weapons and their ammunition. In this context, I wish to recall that in its 1997 report, the UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms recommended that all States should ensure the safeguarding of such surplus weapons against loss through theft or corruption, in particular from storage facilities.

The Commission should also give some consideration to the potential contributions of technology. Though technology is often held responsible for the growing brutality of modern weaponry, it also offers many potentially valuable contributions to international confidence building. The growing availability of high-resolution satellite imagery at reduced cost, for example, can help as an important supplementary means of reassuring countries against imminent invasion threats. Advancements in aerial and ground sensors can work to build confidence in existing arms control agreements. New telecommunications technologies can be used to reduce the risk of accidents or misunderstandings leading to war. Technology can surely offer no substitute for mutual trust and understanding, but it does offer more than merely the means for mutual annihilation.

The Commission has a difficult road ahead, given the diversity of stakes involved, the variety of motivations for engaging in the arms trade, and the impact of alliance commitments upon national supply policies. There is no inherent reason, however, why a consensus cannot be forged on some specific practical measures that will permit reasonable investments in national security while stemming competitive tendencies leading to arms races and eventually civil or international wars.

## Conclusion

The challenges facing this 2000 Disarmament Commission are formidable. So too must be its political will to overcome them. Yet progress in disarmament can have its own remarkable effect upon the political climate. In the words of former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld:

*“... the very study of disarmament may be the vehicle for progress towards greater international political understanding. This is to say, disarmament is never the result only of the political situation; it is also partly instrumental in creating the political situation ... We must, I think, show greater patience in this whole field than ever before.”*

This is wise counsel indeed, and helps to explain his conviction that disarmament had become a “hardy perennial” at the United Nations. Though he did not live to see the end of the Cold War, he would surely wish the Commission well in its deliberations and offer us all the hope that this hardy old perennial will finally bear the fruit the world has so long been anticipating. I can think of no better way to commence a new millennium and a new page in the history of the United Nations.