

Statement before the Disarmament Commission

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Madam Chairperson, distinguished delegates, I appreciate this privilege of addressing the Commission once again as it opens a new session. 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. May I congratulate you in particular, Madam Chairperson, for achieving the unique distinction of being the first woman to chair this Commission -- this marks another welcome breakthrough in the proverbial glass ceiling.

I would like at the outset to recall that the Commission will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, making it no doubt older than many of the distinguished representatives in this chamber today. The global conditions for pursuing disarmament goals have evolved dramatically since 4 February 1952, when the Commission -- then meeting at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris -- opened its first session. It is no small coincidence that just as these conditions have changed, so too has the work of the Commission fluctuated between periods of productivity and relative decline.

The General Assembly's assessment of the conditions in 1952 was spelled out in the preamble of the resolution creating the Commission. In clear and somber terms, the Member States were "*Moved* by anxiety at the general lack of confidence plaguing the world and leading to the burden of increasing armaments and the fear of war."

Many of these sentiments linger even today, in the light of recent trends of rising military expenditures, mounting civilian casualties in armed conflicts, and the continuing risks of catastrophic wars, up to and including nuclear war. Yet the relevance today of this early resolution extends beyond its tone -- it addresses matters of substance as well. It stated that the Commission was to address "the regulation, limitation and balanced reduction of all armed forces and all armaments" as well as measures concerning "the elimination of all major weapons adaptable to mass destruction." The close resemblance between the Commission's agendas then and now is a poignant reminder of extraordinary challenges that lie ahead in these important fields.

The challenge of nuclear disarmament is particularly demanding, for as awesome as are the social, economic, and environmental costs of producing nuclear weapons, these costs would pale to those that would arise as a result of a nuclear war. Progress toward achieving literally every goal in the Charter tacitly assumes the non-occurrence of such a war. The States Parties to the NPT agreed last year that this challenge could not be overcome by halfway measures -- instead, they concluded, "the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons." The nuclear-weapon States Parties took a positive step in this direction by making an "unequivocal undertaking . . . to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament."

Yet because the NPT is not yet a universal treaty, it is vitally important for the world community to continue its determined efforts to discover the ways and means of achieving nuclear disarmament as soon as possible. The Commission has a unique role to play in this regard. The Conference on Disarmament -- the world's only multilateral negotiating body for disarmament -- has for many years been unable to reach a consensus on a work agenda. As for the First Committee, it considers almost fifty resolutions each year, of which nuclear disarmament is only one among numerous additional issues it must address.

The Commission, however, combines its universal membership with a mandate that allows it to focus its deliberations intensely on two crucial issues relating to nuclear disarmament and conventional arms control. In performing this role, the Commission is playing an extremely important role in the slow, incremental process of building and maintaining global disarmament norms.

Its record of achievement over the last decade -- recognizing that it is exclusively a deliberative body -- is impressive indeed. In 1999, it reached a consensus on two sets of guidelines concerning the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones and on conventional arms control, with particular emphasis to the consolidation of peace following armed conflicts. In 1996, it reached agreement on guidelines for international arms transfers. In 1993, it was able to agree on guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament within the context of global security. And in 1992, it issued guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters.

Reaching a global consensus on disarmament matters is never easy, given the inherent sensitivity of the issues -- yet reaching such a consensus five times in a decade is by any reasonable definition an impressive feat. Though the guidelines are not legally binding, they play a key role in establishing agreed ground rules for the conduct of national security policies in an increasingly interdependent global environment.

These agreed guidelines offer individual citizens -- including those who work in legislatures, non-governmental groups, the news media, academia, and religious institutions -- a benchmark against which the actions of states can be assessed. If the Commission is to be faulted for anything, its "sin" is in not doing more to publicize its accomplishments for the entire world to understand and to use. These guidelines are not mere pieces of parchment, but are invaluable, even inspirational tools for concrete national and international initiatives. They deserve to be read by wider publics.

For this reason, I am pleased to say that the Department of Disarmament Affairs has placed on its web site the full texts of all the guidelines and recommendations that the Commission has approved since its re-establishment after the General Assembly's first Special Session on Disarmament in 1978.

Though the last decade was not a time of nuclear war, it was indeed a time of devastating bloodshed involving the use of an ever-expanding variety of conventional arms -- an era also marked by the advent of the so-called "Revolution in Military Affairs." By some estimates, over five million people have been killed in armed conflicts during the post-Cold War era. Military budgets have reportedly grown to around \$800 billion a year, about 90 percent of Cold War levels. Arms exports to many highly unstable regions are also on the rise. We continue to witness serious problems in enforcing arms embargoes mandated by the Security Council, particularly in Africa. Illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons has evolved from a national and a regional problem into a crisis of truly global dimensions -- one that will be the focus of a major international conference at the United Nations next July.

This expenditure, this loss of life, and this disrespect for the rule of law, has eroded human security everywhere. It is therefore highly appropriate that the Commission would again focus its attention on confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms.

One of the classic measures in this field concerns the importance of enhancing transparency over the production, stockpiling, and transfer of arms. It is worth recalling that the Commission's founding resolution gave some considerable weight to this issue in outlining the key principles that were to guide the work of the commission. Indeed, the first such principle found in that resolution provided that --

In a system of guaranteed disarmament there must be progressive disclosure and verification on a continuing basis of all armed forces . . . and all armaments

including atomic.

Building upon work begun during the League of Nations, the United Nations has continued and progressively expanded its efforts to gather data on the production and trade in arms. The Register on Conventional Arms is one such tool by which this goal is pursued with respect to seven categories of major conventional weapons systems. Another is the standardized reporting instrument for military expenditures. Perhaps one of the most unfortunate confidence-reduction measures in this field relates to the failure of many states either to use these two specific tools or to use them regularly.

Unlike weapons of mass destruction -- which have either been outlawed internationally or are slated for elimination worldwide -- conventional arms have many legitimate purposes, particularly with respect to implementing "the inherent right to individual or collective self-defense" found in Article 51 of the Charter. Having such legitimate uses, large industries have grown with vested interests in the continued production and export of such arms. Furthermore, such arms are also used for a variety of foreign policy purposes, including the collective defence of international peace and security under Chapter VII of the Charter. These legal, economic, and political factors have made conventional arms control a very difficult challenge indeed, but one worthy of the continued efforts of diplomats and private citizens everywhere.

As intractable as many of these problems have been, it is vitally important for Member States to continue their search for progress. For the same Member States also have enormously significant interests to advance through the success of confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. Reductions in the production of such arms free resources for use elsewhere in society. Controls that reduce the intensity or duration of armed conflicts enhance prospects for social and economic development. Even the environment stands to gain from progress in these areas. The wider the gains, the wider will be the political support for the new controls, and the greater will be the likelihood that they will be adopted and enforced.

Progress in the field of conventional arms control is therefore an entirely reasonable objective to pursue. One need only look at the enormous reductions in conventional arms that followed from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Governments worldwide are becoming more and more receptive to new controls in this field -- this is particularly evident in regional initiatives that have emerged in recent years from Latin America, Europe, the West African ECOWAS moratorium, and other efforts now underway in these regions and elsewhere. Perhaps the cresting interest in the Small Arms conference next July will serve as a further inducement for progress in the Commission's deliberations in the conventional arms field. The interest that non-governmental groups have shown in that event is further evidence of the support that exists in civil society for such progress in the months and years ahead.

As we begin our deliberations today, let us not simply recall, but build upon the broad consensus manifested in the Millennium Declaration and in many other events last year that signaled the collective will of the peoples of the world for a new beginning on disarmament

issues in the new millennium. Let us make this a new beginning. Let us begin today.

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