

## Statement before the Disarmament Commission

By

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I am honoured to address the Disarmament Commission as it commences its 2010 substantive session and wish at the outset to commend its departing Chairman, Ambassador Andrzej Towpik, for his competent stewardship of the work of this Commission last year. I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Jean-Francis Zinsou for his election as the new Chairman. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist the Chairman, the distinguished members of the bureau, and all delegations throughout this session.

The Commission is commencing its work this year in quite a different environment from that which existed in years past. A fresh, affirmative spirit of multilateralism has been rekindled in disarmament and non-proliferation deliberations in many arenas.

We hear global nuclear disarmament less and less relegated to the vague status of an “ultimate goal” and more and more cited as an imperative for national and collective action—even better, an imperative that has even been recognized by the States possessing such weapons, and recognized, we all know, at the highest levels.

We are also witnessing a new recognition throughout the world of the need to strengthen the rule of law in many disarmament areas—a recognition that is apparent in the ongoing efforts to negotiate new treaties concerning the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force, to commence negotiations on a fissile material treaty, to expand membership in treaties that outlaw inhumane weapons, landmines, and cluster munitions, to develop legal restraints on conventional arms exports, and to strengthen compliance with all these treaties, while exploring the potential negotiation of new legal instruments in such areas as space weapons and, one day perhaps, missiles.

Last year, we also witnessed the entry into force of treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones in Central Asia and Africa, though work remains in achieving ratifications of all their relevant Protocols.

I do not wish to minimize the challenges ahead, however, in achieving all the many goals incorporated under the great umbrella of “general and complete disarmament,” nor the hard work

that will lie ahead in forging a consensus on the three issues on the agenda of this Commission, concerning nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, a new Disarmament Decade, and practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. Yet these issues are not before this Commission because they are easy, but because they both difficult and important to pursue in this unique forum, which allows for in-depth deliberation on a small number of key substantive issues. This is the very *raison d'être* of the Disarmament Commission. This is its main function as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and a primary component of the wider UN disarmament machinery.

The delegations in attendance today are well aware that it has now been eleven years since the Disarmament Commission was able to reach a consensus on key substantive issues on its agenda. In the past, the greatest obstacles to progress were as they have always been in this field—namely, a pervasive climate of mistrust, mutual suspicion, and lack of confidence that stated goals are being reflected in concrete actions. Yet just as developments outside the United Nations have helped to improve this climate—including the progress in strategic arms negotiations, and new disarmament initiatives from Member States and civil society—so too has the time come for UN institutions to make their own new contributions to this encouraging trend.

A positive outcome from this substantive session of the Disarmament Commission would help in revitalizing a truly multilateral approach to dealing with these great global challenges in the field of disarmament, as we travel our common road together in the months and years to come. I therefore wish all delegations well in their deliberations and reaffirm the commitment of the Office for Disarmament Affairs to assist you, to the best of our ability, in reaching our common destinations.