

**Meeting of the Group of interested states established in accordance with  
GA Resolution 52/38G "Consolidation of Peace through Practical Disarmament Measures"  
Tuesday, 3 March 1998, 10 a.m., Conference Room 6**

**Statement by Jayantha Dhanapala  
Under-Secretary-General  
Department for Disarmament Affairs**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your introduction and for the kind words that you have addressed to me. I am very happy that so early in my tenure as Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs I have this opportunity of addressing a gathering devoted to a very vital aspect of disarmament. This opportunity, so soon after the re-establishment of the Department of Disarmament Affairs, to focus on a very fundamental link between disarmament, peace, security and development, I think helps to illustrate the holistic approach to security that is gradually gathering momentum throughout the world. It also, I think, disproves the accusation that is sometimes leveled against those who engage in disarmament work that it is a very esoteric and theoretical exercise where a lot of arcane ideas are bandied about amongst a select few. Here we have a subject which is directly impacting on the lives of people in countries. Practical disarmament therefore is a very real issue that we are addressing in the field of disarmament.

We have over the years accumulated a great deal of experience in peacekeeping, in peace building and in peacemaking and now we are trying to glean from that experience in order to ensure that the disarmament component is addressed realistically when we engage in conflict resolution so that we may have a durable peace. Because precisely what peace is has sometimes been a subject of controversy. We certainly do not want to have a mere absence of war. We certainly do not want to have an armed peace. We do want to have a peace which is a durable one and we know that in order to have a durable peace it is very important that we should ensure that security is achieved at the lowest level of arms both internationally as well as in a national context and this is precisely what practical disarmament will entail. I am very glad that we have representation from the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Political Affairs which only goes to show that the Secretary-General's reforms and his emphasis on coordination is taking effect so that we are approaching the issues of practical disarmament with the joint resources of all the departments that are engaged in this task.

Now, to give you a little bit about the background of practical disarmament which the Chairman has already provided you, I think it is also useful for us to look at the Charter because the Charter, although it has fairly sparse references to disarmament itself, despite the fact that the first resolution in the UN General Assembly was on disarmament, does empower the General Assembly to formulate "general principles of cooperation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments". It is in this context that the resolutions on practical disarmament have been conceived. We had first of all resolution 51/45 of 1996 which stressed the importance of measures such as the collection, control and disposal of arms, especially small arms and light

weapons, which talked about the need for restraint over the production, procurement and transfer of such arms, the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, demining and conversion for the maintenance and consolidation of peace and security in areas that have suffered from conflict and the need to provide a political framework for these practical disarmament measures.

Now, more recently, there has been of course a substantive session of the Disarmament Commission last year where guidelines on conventional arms control limitation and disarmament, with particular emphasis on the consolidation of peace was discussed. There was a working paper by Germany, a country which has contributed enormously towards the conceptualization and the practical implementation of these practical disarmament measures as evidenced by the fact that we have as Chairman the distinguished Ambassador of Germany. And, in this paper a number of very valuable ideas surfaced, including suggestions about weapons buy-back programs, curbs on illicit arms trade and greater donor country involvement and parallel progress in security and development among regions most affected by problem areas in conventional disarmament. Several other countries also submitted working papers with extremely valuable ideas. We then had a panel of governmental experts on small arms which submitted its report at the end of last year and which has been empowered now to continue its work. We have also had very valuable inputs from the United Nations Institute of Disarmament Research, an institute which I had the privilege of directing some years ago, which has addressed a number of specific case studies where disarmament, practical disarmament measures, have been implemented and Mali is a particular case in point.

Now, the Secretary-General in his reform proposals, has very clearly underlined the importance of disarmament and talked about disarmament being a central issue on the global agenda. And it is in order to respond to the fundamental importance of disarmament that he has re-established the Department of Disarmament Affairs and we in this new department hope to focus on the entire gamut of issues on the disarmament agenda. Our intention is to have a number of branches at headquarters which will take into account not only the problems of the weapons of mass destruction, but also problems of conventional arms under which we will deal with small arms, practical disarmament measures, the conventional arms register and so on in addition of course to the other ongoing activities of the department. The steps that are needed in pursuance of practical disarmament measures have been indicated in the document that was submitted to the General Assembly last year and may I recapitulate them very briefly. Firstly, steps could be taken to include weapons-related issues as an integral part of peace accords where the UN is involved in conflict resolution. There could be, for example, retrieval, storage and safeguarding of weapons belonging to demobilized personnel and destruction of ammunition and weapons buy-back programmes. Secondly, we could promote an exchange of national and sub-regional experiences in the collection, control and disposal of arms, especially small arms and light weapons and the reintegration of former combatants into civil society at the end of armed conflicts. Thirdly, we could encourage the harmonization of national legislation to monitor trans-boundary traffic on illicit arms and the pulling together of information about acts of criminality across national frontiers. Fourthly, we could generate a better public understanding

of practical disarmament measures, a consciousness raising exercise which is intended to maintain and consolidate peace and security in areas that have suffered from armed conflicts. This could be done through the collection and dissemination of information about the direct and indirect consequences of excessive accumulation, proliferation and use of weapons, including light weapons. Fifthly, and finally, we could encourage greater transparency in military matters and seek wider adherence to tools of confidence-building such as periodical reporting of military expenditures and the establishment of registers for specific categories of conventional arms.

The General Assembly resolution itself, 52/38C, which I have no doubt all of you are familiar with, does go back to the original Resolution 51/45N of 1996 and after recounting the progress of events since then, stresses the relevance of the importance of the discussions in the Disarmament Commission which has already been referred to by the Chairman and suggests that in the future we have this group in order to facilitate the process of assisting affected states in their efforts to consolidate peace so as to have an effective implementation of practical disarmament measures. And consequently, the fact that we have this group comprised today is a very important start of our activities. I endorse the views of the Chairman with regard to his concept of what this group can do in the future to function as a focal point. I think the consensus adoption of Resolution 52/38G is really an important milestone in our progress towards having a multilateral consensus on this issue of practical disarmament measures and a demonstration of the fact that the international community does want to support situation-specific proposals for disarmament. It is a welcome development as it recognizes also the immediacy of concerns in particular regions which are unfortunately besieged with conflicts and that these conflicts require not merely band-aid solutions to stop the fighting but also require more permanent and durable measures in order to consolidate the peace. There are, of course, valuable lessons that we have to learn, as I said earlier, from the UN's own experience in effecting a transition from the cessation of armed conflicts to the restoration, the establishment and the maintenance of peace and Mali is a classic example of this. In two weeks time, UNIDIR will release a publication on the Mali experience and it is my hope that the distinguished Secretary-General and I will be present in Geneva when this is done. And this is one way in which we can disseminate the experience of one country with regard to practical disarmament measures in order to try to benefit other countries who wish to learn from this experience. In some countries, the process of weapons collection, disposal and destruction may involve broader commitment to reintegrate the former combatants into civil society and this is a very important issue demonstrated by the experience of so many countries.

As far as the agenda of this meeting is concerned, the Chairman has already suggested that we should proceed in a pragmatic manner and try to come up with concrete suggestions with regard to how we can help countries that need assistance with regard to these practical disarmament measures. I would, myself, add three further points. I think it is extremely important that practical proposals of specific concern to particular regions should be forwarded at this stage. It is most important that these proposals should come particularly from the countries that are affected since they are able to understand their genuine needs much more than somebody from outside can and there must, therefore, be this partnership between donors and recipients so

that the genuine needs of the recipients are met by the projects that are being implemented. Secondly, I think this meeting could help to assess the nature and the volume of the material and logistical international support required for implementing these proposals. It is necessary for us not to be over ambitious as the Chairman has warned us. We need to find out exactly what the demand is for this assistance and what can be met in terms of the supply of assistance. A mismatch would be disappointing to others and frustrating to still others. So let us try to be realistic in trying to establish exactly what the needs are of the countries who require this assistance and try to match it with the appropriate amount of assistance. Thirdly, I think we could consider ways and means of administering such proposals in the most cost effective manner to ensure that the maximum benefit of voluntary contributions committed for the purpose goes to the affected regions.

As far as the Secretariat is concerned, I can pledge the wholehearted support of my Department to the work of practical disarmament measures and to the group here who will begin their work today. We are interested in supporting the group in pursuing your objectives and we would like to encourage you to make specific proposals and we will help to implement these proposals. What the Secretariat is in a position to provide at the moment is a brief assessment of the lessons learned in a number of countries where there will have been conflicts and practical disarmament measures. This will probably take about two months for us to prepare and my able colleague here, Swadesh Rana, will undertake that task as quickly as possible. We will also work together with the DPKO and the DPA to evolve some guidelines with regard to including weapons related issues amongst the peace agreements negotiated by or with the assistance of the UN. One such issue could be the preparation of inventories of weapons and skills of former combatants. Another could be training workshops to facilitate the reintegration of combatants into civil society, especially for the younger population who have been involved in armed conflicts. We are aware that in situations of prolonged armed conflicts, groups develop vested interest in violence. And it is important, therefore, that the pickings of war be not made so attractive that it helps to prolong conflict.

I think we must be also mindful of work that is going on elsewhere in the international system. The World Bank is engaged in post-conflict reconstruction and my Department will actively cooperate with The World Bank to coordinate our activities with them so that there would be a combined movement forward with regard to practical disarmament measures. There are also a number of NGOs working in the field and in accordance with the Secretary-General's own policy of reaching out to civil society, we will work very closely with NGOs as well with regard to practical disarmament measures they may have implemented. There is also UNDP who are very much involved in the development field and as in the case of landmines, they themselves encounter these problems which impinge on the subject of disarmament and our cooperation with them is also assured as far as the Department of Disarmament Affairs is concerned.

Let me conclude by saying that we are aware that the post-Cold War situation has seen a dramatic decline in military expenditure. At the same time, we are not yet clear that the peace dividend that was talked about so eloquently in the past has become available for development.

It is a complex issue. It is not an issue that can be solved very easily or simply. Conflicts have to be more and more addressed at the intra-state level. As SIPRI has noted, of the twenty-seven major armed conflicts prevailing, twenty-six are intra-state conflicts. We have to also ensure that in this post-conflict situation, human development takes place and that there is a genuine effort at poverty alleviation. Regional initiatives are also extremely important in this situation because we know that the problem of security is not something that can be confined to national boundaries. There are always linkages outside boundaries. And so, in this very complex situation after the end of the Cold War, it is important that we focus on practical issues where we can ensure that a durable peace will endure.

Thank you very much.