

## **SYMPOSIUM ON DISARMAMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

20 July 1999, 3:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

UN Headquarters, Conference Room 8

### **Opening Remarks**

Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs

Jayantha Dhanapala

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first symposium being held under the aegis of the Steering Group on Disarmament and Development.

The Secretary-General expressed his intention last year to institute a Steering Group as a successor to the high-level Task Force that was established as a follow-up to the International Conference on Disarmament and Development, held at United Nations Headquarters in September 1987. In line with his intention, the Steering Group held its inaugural meeting in May and agreed on a programme to highlight various disarmament and development issues. The Steering Group comprises the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and myself as Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs.

An area of activity we plan to pursue is to organize events, such as tDDay's symposium, on a periodic basis. The Steering Group believes that its objectives in the disarmament and development field would be greatly facilitated by the involvement of non-governmental organizations and civil society in general. That this symposium has been organized in collaboration with Economists Allied for Arms Reduction (ECAAR) reflects our belief in interacting closely with civil society. I would like to take this opportunity to thank ECAAR for their excellent cooperation and to express my gratitude to Professors Lawrence Klein and Michael Klare for being on the panel today.

The Steering Group believes in a forward-looking approach, in the light of the major changes that have taken place in international society since the 1987 International Conference.

Rapid technological change, particularly in information technology, the end of the Cold War that had kept the world largely bipolar for almost 50 years, and the new people-centered development agenda that has emerged in recent years are some of the factors that have contributed to a redefinition of key concepts. The traditional notion of security is being rapidly replaced by the more holistic concept of

human security, which goes beyond security against external military threat, incorporating non-military threats to security as well as threats emanating internally from civil conflict and violence. A foremost challenge that confronts us today is the creation of an enabling environment for eradicating the curse of poverty, which afflicts many societies, and achieving sustainable development.

International financial institutions, such as the World Bank, have begun to focus greater attention on the devastating consequences of civil conflict on development and the underlying social, economic and political causes of conflict. Similarly, the challenges associated with peacebuilding in post-conflict or war-torn societies have attracted increasing international attention. There is a growing consensus that unless socio-economic progress can be made on a sustainable basis and the fundamental human rights of people are fully recognised, conflict and violence will continue to undermine development prospects.

While new concerns have emerged, some traditional concerns remain valid. The "global arms race" which dominated the disarmament and development debate during the Cold War has ceased to be relevant, at least for the moment, but the social and economic consequences of military expenditure remain a cause for concern. For example, even where defence spending has not risen significantly, expenditure levels may still be sufficiently high to impact negatively on resource allocation for development priorities.

According to data released by the Stockholm Peace Research Institute, the global arms expenditure in 1998 was 745 billion dollars, calculated at 1990 prices. Although this figure is less than the amount of resources expended on defence during the height of the Cold War, the unfortunate fact is that military spending at \$125 per capita continues to dwarf spending on social sectors that are essential to human well-being. In many cases, savings on defence could make a big difference to human development, while an environment of security would facilitate a lowering of military expenditure. There are also ominous signs that the recent trend will be reversed and global military expenditure will rise from the year 2000.

According to UNDP's Human Development Report of 1999, an additional annual allocation of 8 billion dollars a year could provide universal access to primary education for all. This amount constitutes one per cent of the wealth of the world's 200 richest people. Similarly, UNDP calculated last year that an additional investment of 13 billion dollars a year would meet the requirements of basic health and nutrition for all.

Another factor that has impacted negatively on development has been the overall shrinkage in development assistance from donor countries. According to the 1999 World Economic Survey by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, development assistance from the OECD countries constituted 0.22 per cent of their collective GNP in 1997, which is the lowest ratio since 1970. It is also much lower than the target of 0.7 per cent by the year 2000, which was adopted by the United Nations. More worrying is the fact that overall official development assistance from OECD to the Least Developed Countries has fallen more sharply. External assistance, both technical and financial, is particularly critical to the success of peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict societies, where disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and reconstruction have to be undertaken as an integrated package of measures.

Conversion of military facilities for productive civilian purposes is another long-standing issue. This concept is being increasingly viewed in a wider context, in terms of the transformation of military structures and resources for peaceful uses, covering not only the conversion of military production facilities but also the downsizing of military forces, the reduction of military expenditures, the orientation of research and development spending, the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, and the destruction of surplus weapons. Many of these issues are critical to transitional societies, such as those belonging to the former Soviet Union, and to post-conflict societies which face the daunting task of reconstruction in the aftermath of a devastating civil war.

While concern about the incidence of civil conflict has increased greatly in recent years, the danger of inter-state conflict remains an abiding concern. One reminder of that is the on-going conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea over a border dispute. It is a conflict that has further impoverished these very poor societies. There are territorial and other sources of dispute between states that could ignite conflict elsewhere.

In view of the difficult social and economic conditions prevailing in large parts of the world, and the debilitating effects of civil conflict in many societies, perhaps the greatest challenge that lies immediately ahead is to strengthen efforts at conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. According to one estimate, roughly half of the world's nations have experienced some form of internal strife in recent years. The most affected have been the poorer nations that can least cope with the consequences of strife. For example, 15 of the 20 poorest countries have experienced prolonged conflict during the past decade.

The global proliferation of small arms is another area where urgent measures are needed in order to safeguard societies from their destabilizing effects. It is alarming that AK-47s, for example, can be purchased in some areas for as little as \$15 a piece. Small arms are the principal instruments of violence in civil conflicts and the main cause of civilian casualties. Even in non-conflict situations, their easy availability has contributed greatly to social disorder and political instability, thereby damaging development prospects and raising the level of insecurity. Illicit trafficking, in particular, poses a challenge because of the ease with which such weapons can be kept in circulation by unscrupulous arms merchants and trans-national criminal organizations also engaged in other illicit activities, notably drug trafficking.

As reflected in the International Conference on Sustainable Disarmament for Sustainable Development, which was held in Brussels in October 1998, the linkages between disarmament and development are gaining wide recognition, and these linkages are particularly pronounced in the context of peacebuilding in post-conflict societies.

As many of you would know, the United Nations is seized with various aspects of the small arms issue and post-conflict peacebuilding as priority concerns. Early this month, the Security Council focused exclusively on post-conflict peacebuilding issues of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and has requested the Secretary-General to submit a report containing recommendations, including the lessons learned in peacebuilding. Disarmament is now recognised as a pre-eminent tool of preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding. Weapons collection and weapons destruction programmes are an important element in this.

It is a most welcome development that international financial and economic institutions, as well as development agencies of some donor governments, are addressing these challenges. Disarmament is clearly a global public good that confers universal benefits, releasing valuable resources for development.

Let me conclude by saying that it is the aim of the Steering Group on disarmament and development to promote a better understanding of important issues and facilitate consensus-building by holding periodic symposia, seminars or lectures. This, as I indicated earlier, is something which we wish to do in partnership with all Member States and with civil society.