

Civil Society and the Verification of Disarmament

Statement before Workshop on "Societal Verification -- Whistleblowing -- Citizens's Reporting

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by

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I welcome this opportunity of sending a message to the workshop on *Societal Verification* at the Hague Appeal for Peace conference.

Citizen verification should promote confidence-building between parties to agreements and should also enhance the legitimacy of those agreements in the eyes of the general public. They should help demystify such agreements and to bring them down to earth for all citizens to understand as practical realities. They should help to make people the ultimate "stakeholders" in maintaining such agreements.

As more and more information becomes available -- for example, through commercial satellite services, the internet, and rapidly expanding computer capabilities -- average citizens will inevitably have before them better resources for keeping track of contemporary events than have ever been available in history. Yet we must also remember that the spread of information technology will be uneven and that some countries remain better endowed than others.

There are, of course, many risks ahead that should be recognized. The massive influx of data into the public airways will not automatically translate into wise policies. Much of this information is either false or can never be fully corroborated. Some countries with deadly weapons programs have closed political systems that are quite inhospitable to citizen verification. It is possible that whistleblowers also may be tempted to act on the basis of motivations that have nothing to do with actual or potential violations of arms agreements. The process of citizen verification must therefore be rooted in a system of law, one that not only protects the participants but also protects the society at large from potential political abuses.

Citizen verification offers a means of complementing other means of verification, none of which can possibly be expected to serve as a guarantee of 100 percent compliance with arms accords. Wars, in short, may result from accidents and miscalculation even with a functioning system of citizen

verification.

Nevertheless, just about everybody who works in a government or an international organization today is aware of the enormous potential that exists in civil society for collective action to address many of the diverse problems that are the focus of activities by such institutions tDDAy. It is not at all unreasonable that citizens should also make their contributions in the realm of world peace and security, a message that is being sent loud and clear by the Hague Appeal for Peace.

The United Nations is actively seeking to improve its ties to civil society precisely because the UN serves the people and the people have much to offer in helping to accomplish the organization's many missions. So I wish you all success in this workshop and in all your pursuits in this vitally important area.