

Remarks before Hague Appeal for Peace 1999

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Despite not being able to be with you in person today, I am glad to have this opportunity to speak on global disarmament before the Hague Appeal for Peace on the occasion of the centennial of the 1899 Hague Peace Conference.

Count Mouravieff's famous Note of 12 August 1898 inviting Governments to attend a conference on international peace is remarkably relevant to our contemporary global situation --

- It spoke of the *"burdens of excessive armaments which weigh upon all nations."*
- It identified the need to limit *"the progressive development of existing armaments."*
- It recognized the irony of *"acquiring terrible engines of destruction, which though to-day regarded as the last word of science, are destined to-morrow to lose all value in consequence of some fresh discovery in the same field."*

The conferences that followed left a diplomatic legacy that included new tools for governments to use in the pursuit of peace. These include disarmament, the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the sovereign equality of states, the need for humanitarian legal constraints in war, and the value of permanent international machinery to assist states in achieving their ends by peaceful means. The fact that governments chose all too often in the twentieth century not to employ these tools suggests more of a problem of state policy than the inadequacy of the basic concepts advanced at The Hague.

Today, we face many of the circumstances that inspired the first Hague Peace Conference. Once again, we see rising military expenditures. We continue to see civilians killed in intra-state and inter-state wars. We see the use of explosives dropped from the air and planted in the ground. We continue to see the onward march in the lethality of all kinds of weaponry, the vicious circle of competition in the production and advancement of such arms. We see the bloodshed that unrestrained nationalism and separatism has produced. Yet despite all these challenges, there are still grounds for hope that the organizers of the *bicentennial* of The Hague Peace Conference in 2099 will have a much happier history to review.

The most auspicious grounds for hope lie in the level of interest throughout civil society in issues of peace and disarmament and the empowerment of civil society to act in pursuit of these ends. The achievement of such goals

will require extraordinary political will on the part of governments of the world -- and groups throughout civil society play a crucial role in helping to shape this political will in relevant governmental arenas. I would like to identify four areas in particular where civil society will -- and must -- play important roles in sustaining the political will needed to achieve a global disarmament agenda.

First, groups in civil society must continue their efforts to promote transparency in government -- in getting the facts out on the table for all to see. Unfortunately, much of the fundamental data about weapons are not currently accessible given various statutory obstacles in many countries. Data on international trade, for example, are typically reported only in the most general of formats because domestic legislation so dictates. With respect to data on conventional weapons, the UN has sought to address this problem by creating and maintaining a Conventional Arms Register and by encouraging Member States to adopt a "standardized reporting instrument" for military expenditures. I believe that it is important for participation in these efforts to become more universal and also for the scope of the subjects covered by these initiatives to be expanded. If we are to have an informed debate on the costs and benefits of disarmament, the public must demand laws that will enable an informed debate to occur. This is a matter for national governments to decide, and a result that will not come about without sustained advocacy throughout civil society.

Second, I believe that what has come to be called "good governance" will also promote the cause of peace. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once stated that *"Without good governance, the foundations of society -- both national and international -- are built on sand."* It opens up opportunities for all to participate in the national political process. It provides peaceful methods for resolving political conflicts. We know that modern conventional war harms civilians far more than military combatants. And we know that women and children account for most of these casualties. Should it not follow that women's groups would be at the vanguard of global disarmament efforts? I am pleased to see ample evidence that women's empowerment efforts are now well underway around the world. This potent source of political will for peace -- while not new by any means -- is clearly making significant headway in this area. After all, half of humanity offers enormous potential for shaping political will.

The third area where civil society must leave its mark concerns the rule of law, a major topic at the original Hague Peace Conference. Global norms relating to peace, prosperity, social justice, and respect for the environment must be enshrined in domestic laws and regulations -- and enforced. Ultimately the true meaning of rule of law is found not in words but in deeds -- and groups throughout civil society have vital roles to play in holding governments accountable in fulfilling their commitments. The rule of law also implies the existence of international collective action in the face of flagrant violations of that law or broader norms or traditions of international behavior.

The fourth means for shaping political will comes from technology. Today, advocates of peace have a growing spectrum of tools at their disposal. For one thing, technology is now available that expands the opportunities of groups in civil society to broaden their influence, while also enhancing the ability of countries to verify the commitments of other countries to arms control and disarmament agreements. There is enormous potential for groups to exploit technology for purposes of mobilizing cooperation among all peoples of the United Nations in the interests of peace, disarmament, and development. Technology cannot alone produce political will to achieve these ends -- but it can surely help.

In summary, disarmament will become sustainable as a process and as a policy when it is institutionalized at the state and international level, when people are given the facts, when leaders are held accountable, and when

technology is dedicated to the cause of peace. We must ensure that people everywhere understand the enormous benefits of disarmament -- its value to human security, its potential for the more efficient and effective use of economic resources to meet compelling human needs, while protecting the environment in the process of addressing those needs. Now more than ever, we must redouble our efforts to restore, reinforce, and sustain indefinitely basic global norms relating to disarmament and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

My final word is simply that we must persist undaunted for we are truly fighting for a noble cause -- the cause of international peace and security not only of our century but for generations to come well into the next millennium.