

# The Prospects for Disarmament in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Introduction

“We the peoples : the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century” is the title of Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s visionary programme of action which will be considered at the Millenium Assembly this Fall. In this report the opportunity of our transition into a new Millenium is used to identify the central challenges confronting humanity. Globalization and governance, freedom from want, disease, ignorance, security and environment issues figure prominently. I have chosen today to focus on the disarmament issue facing us all in the coming century. The rationale for this is simple.

The threats posed by modern weapons of war -- particularly nuclear weapons -- are so grave that they jeopardise literally all of our collective cultural, political, and economic heritage and our natural environment. The issue is vital because disarmament is inextricably linked to human security. What makes disarmament so compelling a strategy for peace and development is that it would eliminate the gravest known threats, and eliminate them more reliably than any conceivable alternative. The moral imperative for disarmament is combined with its self-

evidently practical need in terms of economic and social dividends. This is the heart of my message to you today.

The message is important for many reasons. First, the achievement of disarmament goals requires strong political will and support throughout society, and universities in particular are playing and will continue to play a vital role in cultivating the leaders and good citizens of tomorrow. Second, action is needed because the very subject matter of disarmament is constantly changing as technology evolves. Unless we are quite careful, we will face in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century new threats from weapons that today can barely be imagined, including some that may even rival or exceed the gravity of the global nuclear threat. I am referring here to potential developments relating to biological weaponry, information warfare upon whole societies, and weaponry based on new physical principles -- such as weapons based on high-powered beams or exotic weapons that might someday be capable of producing catastrophic modifications of the environment.

I cannot comment today on the disarmament challenge relating to weapons that do not yet exist, but obviously the best way to face that challenge would be preventing such weapons coming into existence in the first place.

### **A Definition**

Though the aim is intuitively clear, the term “disarmament” is often used with great imprecision. Some writers use this term interchangeably with arms control, a concept that emerged in the cold war. Disarmament, however, involves a lot more than reductions. On 24 April, Mr. Abdul Minty of South Africa stated before the 2000 NPT Review Conference that “it is ... important not to confuse nuclear arms reductions with nuclear disarmament. A commitment to nuclear arms reductions ... does not necessarily translate into a commitment to nuclear disarmament and to a vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.” The same point applies to other weapons systems.

Disarmament means first of all the physical destruction of weapons and -- especially with respect to weapons of mass destruction -- their critical components. It involves forms of destruction that are irreversible. It requires measures to verify that destruction has occurred. It entails a process of accountability and transparency so that the world community can be assured that elimination is in fact occurring.

Disarmament clearly does not involve the perpetual possession by some states of weapons designated for disarmament or non-acquisition by others. In a similar vein, “non-proliferation” is best seen as a means to pursue disarmament -- it should not be confused with disarmament itself.

Proponents of both non-proliferation and disarmament recognize that these goals will not be achieved overnight and that they will require many incremental but concrete steps along the way, steps that often require leaders to make tough decisions involving competing goals and values.

### **Progress and Setbacks**

There are, to be sure, many critics who believe that disarmament is conceptually naïve or worse, dangerous. These critics typically overestimate the value of balances of terror and concepts of deterrence as a basis for world security, and undervalue real accomplishments of disarmament in recent years, including some progress even in the field of nuclear disarmament.

### **Nuclear weapons**

Many weapons present clear and present dangers, but none approaches the potential threats to humanity from nuclear weapons. In 1996, the International Court of Justice issued its famous Advisory Opinion concerning the threat or use of such weapons. Appended to this Opinion was a declaration by Presiding Judge Mohammed Bedjaoui, in which he termed nuclear weapons “the ultimate evil” because of their indiscriminate effects on humanity and its natural environment. He concluded with the “hope” that nuclear disarmament will, in his words, “always remain the ultimate goal of all action in the field of nuclear weapons, that the goal is no longer utopian and that it is the duty of all to seek to attain it more actively than ever.”

From the standpoint of the United Nations, the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons dates back to 1946, when it appeared in the General Assembly’s first resolution. It has been the subject of countless resolutions ever since, from both the General Assembly and the Security Council. It was the focal point of three Special Sessions of the General Assembly on Disarmament. In 1995, agreement on this “ultimate goal” was one of the key “Principles and Objectives” leading to the permanent extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). All the five nuclear-weapon states under that treaty endorse this goal. As clarified pointedly by the ICJ in its Advisory Opinion a year later, the treaty’s goal was not to perpetually negotiate, but actually to bring to a conclusion such negotiations. Thus nuclear disarmament does not just enjoy universal support as a goal of policy -- but it is an objective that has the status of law.

According to available estimates, the numbers of nuclear weapons have been falling sharply over the last decade. Though these numbers are still only a few thousand less than the 39,000 weapons that reportedly existed when the NPT was signed in 1968, the downward trend continues. Another major advancement was the conclusion of negotiations of a Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) -- which has now been signed by 155 countries, 55 of which have also ratified. The Russian Duma’s approval of the treaty this month was another

significant step forward, as was its approval of ratification of the START II Treaty, an action that opens up the way to deeper cuts under START III.

The United Kingdom and France have also taken steps both to limit their nuclear arsenals and to increase transparency. China has joined the NPT, signed the CTBT, and has pledged that it would not provide assistance to any unsafeguarded nuclear facility. The Republic of South Africa demonstrated to the world that a nuclear weapons arsenal can indeed be totally destroyed -- it abandoned its nuclear weapon programme and joined the NPT. The nuclear rivalry between Argentina and Brazil has now been supplanted by cooperation within the framework of bilateral arrangements, the Tlatelolco Treaty, and the NPT. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus joined the NPT after giving up the nuclear weapons that were on their territories when the Soviet Union disintegrated. In 1995, the States Parties to the NPT agreed to extend the treaty indefinitely, strengthen its review process, and establish principles and objectives for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Treaties have also been signed creating nuclear-weapon-free zones in Africa, the South Pacific, and Southeast Asia. These are all steps forward.

Yet the challenges ahead are formidable. While some progress has recently been made in reducing the alert status of nuclear weapons, deeper stockpile reductions await the U.S. Senate's approval of ABM Treaty-related agreements tied to START II and the negotiation of START III. There is no guarantee that existing nuclear-weapon states will not decide to expand their arsenals once again, or continue to explore new-and-improved weapons designs. The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998 undoubtedly set back global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Both countries have not yet joined the CTBT and -- along with Cuba and Israel -- both remain outside the NPT. Over a dozen of the 44 countries required to bring the CTBT into force have still not ratified the treaty, including two nuclear-weapon states (China and the United States).

Despite the reductions achieved thousands of weapons remain in the reserved or retired category and are exempt from official arms limitations, while countless others are being refurbished, kept on hair-trigger alert status, or kept available for possible first-use or use against even non-nuclear-weapon states.

Many countries are beginning to take the nuclear-weapons proliferation threat seriously, as seen in recent IAEA efforts to enhance significantly its nuclear safeguards and verification procedures. Yet the relevant enhanced safeguards protocol is only in force in a few countries, while tons of nuclear materials continue to accumulate in civilian stocks and in some unsafeguarded nuclear programs around the world. Agreement on a treaty to ban the production of fissile nuclear materials for weapons use would serve as a valuable stepping stone to a broader goal of eliminating the production and stockpiling of all weapons-usable nuclear material.

Progress on this issue, however, has been set back by a stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) over nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. And despite many improvements in the physical security of nuclear material in recent years, no control can guarantee that significant quantities of such material will not be vulnerable to terrorist threats.

### **Biological Weapons**

The international community has also been working hard to eliminate another potentially devastating weapon of mass destruction. On 10 April 1972, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) was opened for signature -- it was the first multilaterally-negotiated treaty requiring the destruction of an entire category of weapons. The Geneva Protocol of 1925 had only banned the use of poison gas and bacteriological weapons. It is noteworthy that the BWC was negotiated within multilateral negotiating fora: the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee and its successor the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (or CCD).

This treaty faces two key problems. First, lack of universality. Though 143 states have become parties as of April 2000, many states -- particularly in the Middle East -- have not yet joined. The second problem is its lack of any formal verification regime to monitor compliance. This problem has grown in prominence given perennial allegations of biological weapons activities underway in various countries. Other reports warn of possible terrorist uses of such weapons. Some governments are making more specific allegations, without however providing corroborative details.

This only serves to underscore the importance of creating an objective, international system for verifying compliance, one not dependent upon any one specific source of information. The States Parties to the BWC are working to create just such a system, through the work over the last five years of the Ad Hoc Group in Geneva. Though many of the details still need to be agreed, much work remains ahead. The Ad Hoc Group is mandated to conclude its negotiations before the Fifth Review Conference of the BWC to be held in 2001.

Efforts are underway to reconcile the demands of national sovereignty with the need for a meaningfully-intrusive verification system -- a subject that has bedevilled arms control and disarmament discussions for generations. It is encouraging, however, that the general norm or taboo against the production or use of such weapons appears to be strong indeed throughout the world community.

### **Chemical Weapons**

Negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) were concluded in 1992 in

the Conference on Disarmament, the successor of the CCD. The CWC, which entered into force in 1997, not only outlawed another entire class of weapon of mass destruction, but also established an elaborate system to verify compliance.

This system -- implemented by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague -- covers not only the military sector but also the civilian chemical industry, world-wide, through certain restrictions and obligations regarding the production, processing and consumption of chemicals that are considered relevant to the objectives of the Convention. The controls will be verified through a combination of reporting requirements, routine on-site inspections of declared sites and short-notice challenge inspections. The Convention also contains provisions on assistance in case a State Party is attacked or threatened with attack by chemical weapons and on promoting the trade in chemicals and related equipment among States Parties, which currently number 131.

Like the BWC, the CWC faces the challenge of balancing the need for stringent verification requirements with the realities of national sovereignty. Both treaties also face a difficult challenge arising from the fact that both outlawed weapons can be manufactured clandestinely using readily-available equipment and technology. Both treaties also fall short of universal membership. Nevertheless, despite the challenges that lie ahead, both treaties have already achieved quite a lot. They have worked to reduce significantly a global threat and they have worked to forge a global and non-discriminatory norm against even the possession of two of the most devastating weapons known to humankind.

## **Missiles**

Weapons of mass destruction are deadly enough, but when such weapons are placed atop missiles, their potential for death and destruction multiplies exponentially. In 1987, a small group of countries formed the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), a non-binding voluntary agreement setting some common standards for the export of missile-related goods and technology. Membership in this group has grown over the years to 32 states.

The MTCR is perhaps best interpreted as a first step toward the development of a global system of controls governing missiles and the goods and technology to produce them. It is in no way a disarmament regime per se. It has no ongoing enforcement mechanism, even though the world community has recognized for decades the need for multilateral controls over such weapons. The Preamble of the NPT, for example, quite explicitly identifies the goal of the elimination not just of nuclear weapons but also "the means of their delivery." Yet the international community has collectively done very little to achieve this goal.

In the context of recent tests of medium-range missiles by India and Pakistan, missile

development activities underway in other countries, and current developments in the field of missile defence, Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a statement last year underscoring the need for multilaterally-negotiated norms against the development of such weapons. International agreements on such norms would fill a serious gap in the global architecture of arms control and disarmament. It is noteworthy that former Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev discussed in 1986 the possibility of eliminating long-range strategic nuclear missiles at their famous summit in Reykjavik. This is an issue that surely merits some renewed attention in the years ahead.

### **Conventional Arms**

The international community has been struggling for well over a century to control the production and use of conventional weapons. It is a cause for deep disappointment that despite enormous efforts in this field, both by governments and by groups in civil society, there is so much work that still needs to be done.

In his recent Millennium Report, for example, Secretary-General Annan noted that “the death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems -- and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” He also noted that “there is still no global non-proliferation regime to limit their spread.” A major international conference will convene next year at the UN to address the problem of the illicit trafficking in small arms.

The lack of multilateral controls in this field is especially alarming in light of indications that arms expenditures are starting once again to increase in many countries, after a decade of welcome declines. Domestic pressures to increase arms exports are creating new incentives to expand the global arms market -- a market that is undergoing a wave of mergers and acquisitions. This is a field where norm-building has not kept pace with the internationalization of arms production -- a process that governments have found is quite difficult to control.

### **Outer Space**

Finally, we come to outer space. The Outer Space Treaty prohibits the placement of nuclear weapons into orbit or on the moon or other celestial bodies. It does not, however, prohibit the placement of other weapons into outer space. The Conference on Disarmament is trying to grapple with this issue in an effort to prevent an arms race in outer space. Progress, however, has been frustrated by a lack of consensus. If some of the more ambitious plans are brought to fruition in the field of missile defense, the result could well be the expansion of an arms race to extraterrestrial levels and bring the arms race to new heights, so to speak. This is clearly another area where multilateral norms are much needed.

## Prospects

The prospects for achieving global disarmament goals will hinge both on the enigmatic issue of political will and on the maintenance of overall strategic stability in the world. There is in particular an urgent need to convert global disarmament norms from words into deeds. But what does this mean specifically, particularly with respect to the gravest challenge of nuclear disarmament?

Over the next few weeks, the States Parties to the NPT will be trying not just to find an answer to this question but to forge this answer into an international consensus. This will not be easy, since the issues involved are difficult indeed. The list of answers that countries and non-governmental groups have proposed to this question is extensive, but several themes are notably re-appearing with considerable regularity.

- With respect to strategic arms reductions -- Two immediate priorities are the early entry into force of the CTBT and full implementation of START II. Expectations are high for an early conclusion of negotiations on START III involving deep cuts in nuclear arsenals and major improvements in the transparency of existing stocks of weapons and related materials, as well measures to ensure the irreversibility of the disarmament process. There will be increasing calls for the nuclear-weapon states to de-alert their arsenals -- as was recommended years ago by the Canberra Commission -- to abandon first-use nuclear doctrines, and to eliminate all tactical nuclear weapons. The members of the Conference on Disarmament must once again become a dynamic focal point for multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament, a fissile nuclear material treaty, and progress in preventing an arms race in outer space. There is also an overwhelming global interest in preserving the ABM Treaty as a basis of strategic stability.
- With respect to non-proliferation -- The task of achieving universal membership in the NPT and CTBT is still not complete. Genuine progress will require full implementation of the commitments that led to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, including all of the Principles and Objectives as well as the implementation of the Middle East Resolution. Progress could also be measured in the placement under IAEA safeguards of additional fissile material recovered from dismantled weapons, as well as early adoption by countries with nuclear facilities of the Additional Protocol strengthening IAEA safeguards. The world community must also work to ensure that nuclear cooperation is a privilege reserved for countries that have full-scope IAEA safeguards, rather than a simply another means of advancing political or commercial goals. New efforts are needed to bring the Pelindaba Treaty into force -- creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa -- and to establish such a zone in Central Asia. There is an urgent need for new initiatives by India and Pakistan to promote nuclear disarmament objectives in South Asia, including joint and unconditional accession to the CTBT, agreements not to deploy or test nuclear weapons or long-range missiles, and a halt to the production of fissile nuclear

material. Progress would also come via the negotiation of a treaty guaranteeing non-nuclear-weapon State Parties to the NPT against the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons.

The question then arises, are there any alternative international forums for addressing ways and means of alleviating the dangers associated with nuclear arms and their proliferation? After all, much of the existing international machinery is locked in stalemates over how to address these issues. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has made a useful proposal that deserves thoughtful consideration by all nations. In his recent Millennium Report, he proposed the convening of a major international conference to identify ways to eliminating these dangers. This could occur sometime over the next two years, after the new governments of the U.S. and Russian Federation will have had an opportunity to review their policies in these areas. The intent of this conference would be to help sustain and rekindle the historic process leading to a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The world community clearly needs to improve its collective responses to violations of disarmament and nonproliferation norms concerning all weapons of mass destruction. To the extent that sanctions have been imposed for such violations, many appear invidious and narrow in scope, while others have imposed great hardships upon civilian populations. The more customary form of response to such violations has been the ephemeral statement of regret. An international consensus is also lacking on the role for export controls and other measures to restrain the development of such weapons.

Fortunately, there has been some success in strengthening the role of the UN in the disarmament field. A key institutional reform introduced by Secretary-General Kofi Annan was the re-establishment in 1998 of a UN Department of Disarmament Affairs led by an Under-Secretary-General. The Department advises the Secretary-General on disarmament matters and supports activities throughout the UN's disarmament machinery, which includes the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, the Disarmament Commission, the First Committee of the General Assembly, the Conference on Disarmament, the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, and three regional centres. These include gathering and analyzing data on global weapons developments, sharing information with governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the public, assisting delegations at the UN, organizing international conferences, and serving as an advocate of disarmament.

All this work is needed on the international level. Progress, however, must also occur at the level of individual governments. Disarmament requires a national infrastructure of support. To achieve such a goal, the public must be informed of the full costs of past and current weapons programs and the full benefits to be achieved from successful disarmament arrangements. Information and education will therefore play major roles in the evolution of the institutions and policies of sustainable disarmament.

One helpful step in this direction would be the development of disarmament indices -- concrete empirical measures of the progress and setbacks we are experiencing in pursuing the disarmament goal. The world community is increasingly demanding what might be called "results-based disarmament" -- namely, a disarmament process whereby progress can be measured by concrete, demonstrable achievements -- rather than rhetorical platitudes. I encourage you all to assist with creative ideas about which new benchmarks should be set and how they should be achieved.

In a broader context, the traditional obstacles of disarmament remain with us today -- including nationalism, the pursuit of strategic supremacy, the lack of mutual trust, and the political problems arising from the inability of any technical verification system ever to guarantee perfect compliance.

Many observers now favor unilateral technical and military measures -- often tied to the doctrine of "counter-proliferation" -- as the only appropriate response to global weapons threats. Yet this basic approach, if pursued at the expense of international disarmament obligations and without any global consensus, will more likely serve as a stimulus than a restraint on global nuclear and missile proliferation and new regional and global arms races.

Needed perhaps most of all is progress in constructing an institutional infrastructure of a "disarmament complex," a network of individuals, groups, and institutions focused on the promotion and achievement of weapons reduction and elimination objectives. This will require strong support from civil society. Progress is needed, in short, above, within, and below the level of national governments. Popular support is the stable foundation upon which all sustainable disarmament policies must lie.

## **Conclusion**

Fifty-nine years ago, President Franklin Roosevelt sketched out before Congress his vision of four essential human freedoms. The fourth of these was the freedom from fear, which -- in his words -- "means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor -- anywhere in the world." With global military expenditures still reportedly exceeding \$700 billion a year, we quite obviously have much work ahead to fulfill this goal. More poignant still, President Roosevelt also stated that this goal was "no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation."

Now that we have reached the new millennium, we must work to rekindle some of the political will to pursue common disarmament goals in earnest. Let us together begin the task of converting the disarmament vision into a reality.