

Opening Address

by
Jayantha Dhanapala
Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations
15 February 2000



Strategic Stability, Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament and the 2000 NPT Review Conference

The 12th Regional Disarmament Meeting in the Asia-Pacific Region

Kathmandu, Nepal
15-17 February 2000

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this important meeting organized by the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific. This is the twelfth in a series of annual meetings known as the “Kathmandu process” and I am sure it will once again serve as a valuable forum for participants to exchange views on some of the most critical disarmament and international security issues in the world today -- especially as we do so in a new century and a new millennium. The informal setting of these meetings encourages an open exchange of views and my own remarks today will be presented in this spirit. The presence of such a high caliber of participants and speakers at this meeting is a fitting tribute to the continued, indeed growing, importance of the Regional Centre.

The re-establishment of the United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs in 1998 as a core element in Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s “quiet revolution” of reform coincided with

a fresh focus on regional disarmament through the Regional Centres established in Kathmandu, Lima, and Lome. Last year, I visited both the Lima and Lome Centres which have been revitalized and have become the hub of a programme of activities just as Kathmandu has been for many years.

Kathmandu's role is all the more important given some basic facts that we sometimes tend to forget about the region itself. Asia is the world's largest continent. It is also the region with the largest population -- over 6 in 10 people on Earth are from Asia. It has a proud historical heritage. It is the cradle of major religions. And it continues to inspire the world with its art, music, and philosophy. Yet it has also shown itself not to be immune from many of the afflictions of our times, or perhaps of humankind itself. National rivalries, ethnic conflict, and civil strife have plagued the region. We saw in recent years the vulnerability of the dynamic Southeast Asian and East Asian economies to transnational economic forces. We see every day the impact -- for better and at times for worse -- of modern transportation and communication systems on Asian cultures.

And lamentably, while military expenditures globally declined during the decade of the 1990s, SIPRI reports in its latest *Yearbook* that Asia was the only region where there has been "unabated rapid growth" in military expenditures -- which reportedly increased by 27% in real terms over the past decade. The Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in 1998 have set back progress in nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. And of the 44 countries whose ratifications are needed to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force, it is noteworthy that the only three that have not yet even signed the treaty are in Asia (India, Pakistan, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK). Truly, Asia is a continent of contrasts and ironies.

Against this broad tapestry, perhaps the Centre's most important role is the assistance it provides the Asia-Pacific community in promoting internationally-recognized disarmament norms and the necessary climate of confidence and trust for those norms to be implemented. Its contributions are especially important for two reasons -- first, because the global nuclear disarmament goal is now in jeopardy and will need urgent attention in the years ahead. And second, because developments in Asia will make a big difference either in helping enormously to achieve this goal, or in contributing further to its decline.

The Global Picture

It is beyond question that global disarmament efforts -- particularly those aimed at nuclear disarmament -- are now entering a dangerous new era. States that possess nuclear weapons do not appear to be in any hurry to give them up, despite the unpopularity of such weapons among the general public everywhere. Their leaders *talk* about ultimate disarmament goals, but *balk* at

negotiating concrete measures to achieve such goals. Elements in this bleak picture would surely include the following, for example --

- the failure of the START II treaty to enter into force
- the lack of negotiations on START III
- the reaffirmation by two nuclear-weapon states of nuclear doctrines that at times virtually *exalt* the possession of such weapons
- the persistence of tactical nuclear weapons
- the South Asian nuclear tests
- the conduct of subcritical nuclear tests
- missile tests by countries including those in the Asia-Pacific region
- instabilities arising from possible unilateral deployments of national missile defences
- delays in bringing the CTBT into force
- persisting obstacles in establishing new nuclear-weapon-free zones
- the lack of universality of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as well as the Chemical Weapons Convention and Biological Weapons Convention
- the chronic diplomatic stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament
- nuclear cooperation in the world without full-scope IAEA safeguards
- the lack of a fissile material treaty
- new pressures for an arms race in outer space
- indicators of rising defense expenditures -- and, to complete this picture --
- the mounting human and economic toll from excess stockpiling and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

All of these developments come as a blow to the reasonable expectations of the 182 non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT. In 1995, these parties agreed with the nuclear-weapon states to extend the treaty indefinitely as part of a package of decisions that included a strengthened review process and a set of “principles and objectives” for non-proliferation and disarmament. Also included in this package was a Middle East resolution.

The heart of the strengthened review process was enhanced accountability -- the parties would use this process as a means of assessing compliance by all parties with all the treaty’s provisions. The basic purpose of the new principles and objectives was to identify some specific standards against which compliance could be measured. These include progress in several key areas, such as -- achieving universality of treaty membership, preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, negotiating a ban on the production of fissile material for weapons, establishing new nuclear-weapon-free zones, expanding the application of international safeguards, improving security assurances against the use of nuclear weapons, and ensuring the “determined pursuit” by nuclear-weapon states of “systematic and progressive efforts” toward the goal of eliminating all

such weapons.

In the last paragraph of the 1995 Decision, the Conference requested its president to bring these Decisions to the heads of State or Government and to seek their full cooperation on those documents and in the furtherance of the goal of the Treaty. The important message here is that we must place nuclear disarmament and non•proliferation high on the list of priorities of world leaders, particularly those of the nuclear•weapon•states, a priority this region can help to preserve.

Asian Support for Nuclear Disarmament

Asia's tragic inauguration to the atomic age began with two nuclear explosions in 1945. In the years that followed, enlightened leaders from throughout the region have worked valiantly to eliminate all such weapons. In the voting records of the UN General Assembly, one can find evidence of the depth of Asian antipathy toward nuclear weapons and solidarity in pursuing their elimination. Asia also served for many years as a geopolitical playing field for the conduct of the Cold War by the nuclear powers. To be from Asia is to know what it is like to live under a nuclear shadow.

Though the prospect of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in South Asia has obviously been dealt a grievous blow, five Central Asian states have intensified their efforts to draft their own nuclear-weapon-free treaty. To date, a preponderant part of the text has been agreed. The UN's Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) intends to organize the Second Sapporo meeting next month to assist these states in working out an agreed text.

The Department is also prepared and willing to assist Mongolia in its efforts to declare its nuclear-weapon-free status. Mongolia has held informal consultations with the five nuclear•weapon•states on security assurances. The country has also drafted legislation to ensure its nuclear-weapon-free status.

Many other positive developments in the region deserve to be noted. After the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan joined the NPT after closing its nuclear test site and returning former Soviet nuclear weapons to the Russian Federation. For its part, China has stopped testing nuclear weapons, signed the CTBT, reaffirmed its long-standing no-first-use policy, and pledged never to provide any assistance to any unsafeguarded nuclear facility. Japan has continued its unrelenting efforts on behalf of global nuclear disarmament goals, an effort most recently advanced by its support for the work of the Tokyo Forum for Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. The efforts of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) under the Agreed Framework have succeeded in freezing the operations at sensitive fuel cycle facilities in the DPRK, while efforts continue to encourage the DPRK to comply with its international safeguards obligations. Nine countries in Southeast Asia are now parties to the Bangkok Treaty, which established a

nuclear-weapon-free zone in that subregion.

Asia's Choices and The Road Ahead

In this light, it is certain that Asia can and must play a crucial role in building support for the global norm of nuclear disarmament. In many respects, the future of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regimes can undoubtedly be influenced by developments in Asia. Nobody disputes that Asia is a region of both extraordinary possibilities and extraordinary risks.

If there is ever to be a global regime to curtail or eliminate the production or storage of weapons-usable nuclear material, it will not happen without Asia. If the world is ever to negotiate universally-binding norms against the proliferation of missiles or missile defense systems, it will not happen without Asia. And if the world expects to fulfill the long-sought dream of eliminating all nuclear weapons, it too will not happen without Asia.

Regardless of the issue -- whether it pertains to the threats from nuclear weapons, environmental degradation, or regional economic crises -- when problems sweep across national borders, there is no substitute for public understanding and participation in addressing such problems. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has repeatedly emphasized the vital role of civil society in ensuring public accountability, promoting good governance, and building support for global norms. Global nuclear disarmament is surely one of those issues that will require strong public support both within countries and among them.

Later this year, the UN will be the site of some remarkable events. In May, the UN will host the Millennium Forum, a gathering of NGOs from around the world to deliberate the world's problems and make recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly later this year. In August, the Inter-Parliamentary Union will assemble the heads of the world's legislatures for a historic meeting in the General Assembly. On 6 September, the heads of state and heads of government will assemble for a Millennium Summit -- this is expected to be the largest-ever gathering of such leaders -- who will address the challenges facing the UN in the 21st Century.

This summit will follow the opening of the Millennium Assembly, the term used for this year's General Assembly as it works out a vision for the organization in the coming century, fulfilling a key proposal in the Secretary-General's programme for reform. The UN held a series of regional hearings to prepare for this gathering -- the hearing in East Asia took place on 9-10 September in Tokyo. The common theme throughout these deliberations has been clear: *the peoples of the United Nations* cited in the first line of the Charter remain today the foundation not just of the UN institution but of all hopes for development and international peace and security.

Before concluding, I wish to pay tribute to the Nepalese Government for its continued support of the Regional Centre. According to its mandate, activities of the Regional Centre, including this meeting, have to be financed from voluntary contributions of the UN Member States and other interested organizations. I wish to thank all donors, particularly Rissho•Kosei•Kai, a well known Japanese NGO interested in promoting regional cooperation, whose generous contribution has made it possible for us to organize these annual Katmandu meetings over last twelve years.

Last year's resolution on the Asia•Pacific Regional Centre reaffirmed the General Assembly's strong support for the Regional Centre. It also underscored the importance of the Katmandu process "as a powerful vehicle for the development of the practice of region•wide security and disarmament dialogue." At the same time, the resolution invited the Secretary•General "to initiate consultations with the Government of the Kingdom of Nepal as well as with other Member States concerned, and interested organizations to assess the possibility of enabling the Centre to operate effectively from Katmandu." These consultations have commenced and I welcome views from Member States and other organizations on this issue.

In closing, I wish you all well in your efforts to grapple with the problems on your agenda for this meeting and once again extend to you a very warm welcome. I declare the Twelfth Katmandu Meeting open.