

Prospects for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

by

Jayantha Dhanapala
Under-Secretary-General
Department of Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



Remarks before
Peace and Security Funders Group
New York, NY
30 May 2000

Let me say first of all how pleased I am to speak with you today -- pleased both to address an audience that shares an abiding concern about nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues and that is dedicated to translating that concern into practical action; and pleased to offer some reflections on the prospects for future initiatives in these areas. I do so mindful, and indeed grateful, of the fact that collectively you help mould the agenda of policy-oriented research and activism in this crucial area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

We are now at a critical stage in international affairs. Over a decade has passed since the end of the Cold War. The opportunity of charting a new international order of collective and cooperative security has not been seized. Coming months will indicate whether that opportunity is to be lost totally or whether we can generate sufficient political will to break out of old mindsets pressured by global public opinion. The UN Secretary-General's report to the Millennium Assembly, "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century," is one document that sets out a series of proposals that will help the international community to respond to the challenges of the present and create a better future for the peoples of the world.

In the area of disarmament I have the advantage in preparing these remarks of having recently witnessed one of the most successful review conferences in the history of the NPT, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. On 20 May, the States parties finally -- for the first time in 15 years -- were able to reach a full consensus on a final report of their deliberations over the treaty's past and future. The fact is that the NPT could not have sustained another failure to achieve a consensus final document. It is remarkable enough that over 150 sovereign nation states were able to agree on anything, but remarkable all the more that they were able to agree on matters so profound that they touch upon their own national security and the very foundations of international peace and security.

As we all know, expectations were very low for this conference prior to its commencement on 24 April. Thirty years had elapsed since the States parties solemnly committed themselves to "pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament," a goal spelled out quite clearly in Article VI of the treaty which the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ has reinterpreted so importantly. Yet the victories in the "thirty years war" against nuclear weapons have

regrettably been very few and far between.

In fact, the available facts about nuclear weapons in this period indicate that progress has been at best uneven, at worst non-existent. Despite the chronic lack of transparency of nuclear weapons programmes, available data based on official estimates gathered by the U.S Natural Resources Defence Council indicate that there are still over 30,000 nuclear weapons in the world, just somewhat short of the estimated 39,000 or so weapons that existed in 1970. Three of the nuclear-weapons states even reportedly increased their holdings of nuclear weapons since that date -- Russia, China, and France. Two cases of non-compliance with the NPT among non-nuclear-weapon states have also been recorded during this period.

It is true that there have been some positive developments in recent years that must not be forgotten. Intermediate-range nuclear missiles were eliminated under the INF Treaty. Hundreds of tactical nuclear weapons have been retired or withdrawn from service in specific theatres of potential combat. Tons of nuclear weapons materials have been placed under international safeguards. Physical security over facilities that housed such materials has been improved. The International Atomic Energy Agency has agreed on a "Model Additional Protocol" that substantially strengthens nuclear safeguards. And slowly, very slowly, the general public has been provided new facts and figures that bring to light more details about the gargantuan size of the nuclear weapons complexes in many countries.

Yet these achievements, hard fought though many of them were, offered no guarantee for a successful Review Conference. On the negative side of the ledger were the nuclear tests that were announced by India and Pakistan in May 1998, accompanied by new doctrines of regional nuclear deterrence, doctrines that drew heavily upon the notion of mutual assured destruction that evolved during the Cold War. Though neither country belonged to the NPT, the acquisition and demonstration of new nuclear weapons capabilities in the region, coupled with official policy explanations that publicly celebrated possession of such weapons, ran counter to what many had believed to be a growing international norm against the development, manufacture, or stockpiling of such devices. The refusal of the US Senate to approve the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) was another serious setback. Meanwhile, nuclear weapons continue to play important roles in the security policies of all the states that possess such weapons, with varying degrees of emphasis.

Some of these security policies continue to maintain the option of the first-use of nuclear weapons. Some states reserve the right to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states. Some maintain a policy of calculated ambiguity regarding the use of nuclear weapons as a means of retaliating against attacks involving other types of weapons. Some states continue to deploy nuclear weapons on foreign soil. And all nuclear-weapon states, as far as can be known to the public, are continuing their efforts to modernise their stockpiles.

Thus when Secretary-General Kofi Annan rose to speak at the opening of the 2000 NPT Review Conference on 24 April, he placed considerable emphasis on the need for what he termed a “results-based” treaty review process. Results-based concepts have been used to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public institutions for many years -- including the United Nations I might add -- and there is no reason whatsoever that great progress might not be made in implementing a strategy of results-based disarmament. This is an approach that stresses proven deeds over professed words. It is a process that focuses on facts, not loose promises.

Seen in this light, the most recent NPT Review Conference offers a significant, potentially even an historic step forward for greater progress on both non-proliferation and disarmament.

We see in the final report of this conference an unequivocal commitment by the nuclear-weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear weapons -- we no longer see the vague reference to nuclear disarmament as an “ultimate goal” or contingent on progress achieved in general and complete disarmament. No longer will nuclear doctrines remain outside the focus of future review conferences -- the new report specifically sets as a new benchmark the diminishing role of nuclear weapons in security policies. No longer will de-alerting -- that is, measures to reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons -- remain a subject that is taboo for future treaty deliberations. We also see explicit references to the need to reduce non-strategic nuclear arsenals. We see a call for increased transparency of nuclear weapons capabilities and nuclear export controls. Whereas much of the UN disarmament machinery had in the past been allowed to rust due to lack of political will to use it, we see in this new document a renewed effort to revitalise the Conference on Disarmament, an effort that includes a call for the establishment of a new subsidiary body dedicated explicitly to nuclear disarmament.

With respect to non-proliferation, the States parties collectively reaffirmed the standard of requiring full-scope IAEA safeguards as a “necessary precondition” for new nuclear supply arrangements. The report also made it clear that all States parties, not just the nuclear-weapon states, need to ensure that they are not assisting nuclear-weapons activities in any non-party. In addition, the participating States parties also deplored the nuclear tests in South Asia and called upon both countries in the region to cease their nuclear-weapons activities and join both the NPT and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. This unambiguous declaration came at a time when major states were being suspected of going back to business as usual with India and Pakistan. There was no interest whatsoever to confer any new special status to the nuclear weapons programmes in these countries. With respect to the Middle East, the report specifically cited Israel as a non-NPT party and a state with unsafeguarded nuclear facilities, and also noted Iraq’s non-compliance with a relevant UN Security Council resolution. The report also noted the non-compliance by the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea with its safeguards obligations. It even named the specific States parties that had not yet concluded their safeguards agreements

with the IAEA. These are positive steps forward with respect to transparency, the first of what many hope will be many more to come.

The report also registered a consensus in favor of “preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty as a cornerstone of strategic stability and as a basis for further reductions of strategic offensive weapons” -- a timely statement indeed given current plans by the United States to deploy a national missile defense system as soon as it is technologically possible to do so.

And this was not all that was accomplished. The Conference noted a proposal made by the Secretary-General in his recent Millennium Report -- a call for convening “a major international conference that would help to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers.” Such a conference would not only cover both non-proliferation and disarmament issues, but it would be open to the participation by all countries, including States that are not parties to the NPT. It would, in short, provide a common forum for deepening the world’s understanding of existing nuclear threats. It would underscore the priority and uniqueness of nuclear weapons threats in particular. And it would serve to explore ideas for new initiatives for the international community to consider in addressing these threats in bilateral, regional, and multilateral arenas. At a time when the Conference on Disarmament has been paralysed through a lack of consensus and no agreement has been possible for many years on holding a fourth special session of the UN General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the Secretary-General’s suggestion is a timely one. The proposal will be addressed at the Millennium Summit of the world’s leaders on 6 September and will likely also be considered during the deliberations of the General Assembly’s First Committee in the weeks that will follow that summit.

Finally, the strengthened review process introduced in 1995 was improved upon albeit modestly.

These are just some of the highlights of the most recent Review Conference. They must be hailed as concrete achievements of the multilateral process and provide encouragement for future approaches to the non-proliferation and disarmament.

I think it is undeniable that a group of countries called the New Agenda Coalition had a lot to do with the positive result. This group -- made up of Brazil, South Africa, Sweden, Ireland, Mexico, Egypt, and New Zealand -- worked both before and throughout the review process to forge a global consensus behind many of the ideas that were later enshrined in the final document. They gave voice to the millions of people in civil society around the world that have been demanding further action in these areas. They were credible because their members included both developed and developing countries. They were organised, well-informed, and articulated their arguments clearly and effectively throughout the deliberations. They were also able to build support from among other organized groupings at the conference, including the Non-Aligned Movement, the NATO-5 (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Norway), and the

European Union. For their part, the five nuclear-weapon states issued a joint statement at an early stage of the Conference reiterating their unequivocal commitment to the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament -- a goal that would become more immediate after the end of the conference.

It is highly unlikely that these efforts would have succeeded without genuine concern from throughout civil society. In short, I believe the conference was a success because the states advocating greater actions in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament had wide and deep support from among the people -- the peoples of the United Nations. The progress we have witnessed was in this respect an expression of popular will. It was a glimpse of "good governance" extended onto a global dimension. It is this civil society that we must continue to reach out to.

Yet much of course remains to be done. The NPT Review Conference identified some concrete benchmarks for implementing results-based disarmament -- but it did not, and cannot be expected to achieve this result overnight. Transparency will be one of the most important factors influencing the chances for success in the years ahead. If there is transparency, there can be accountability. The world cannot measure progress in either non-proliferation or disarmament without relevant facts -- speculation is simply not an acceptable basis for assessing genuine progress in either field. We need well-directed research in this area assisted by new technologies including satellite imagery. We need also to focus on the links between nuclear issues and other areas on the international agenda -- human rights, environment, poverty -- all of which impact on human security.

In the years ahead, I predict the world will learn quite a bit more about the true legacy of nuclear weapons. They will learn how many were manufactured, the opportunity costs of their manufacture including health and environmental costs, how many tons of nuclear-weapon materials were produced, what happened to those materials, and where such weapons were located. As more details emerge, I am convinced the greater will be the popular demand to proceed with the final elimination of such weapons. For once, the public will know for a fact the extent to which such weapons have eroded -- rather than enhanced -- national and international security.

Yet the barriers to transparency remain formidable. Various interests and institutions associated with such weapons around the world prefer to work in the dark. Furthermore, new excuses, apart from national security, will be found for justifying massive new defence outlays. We are already seeing some increases of defence budgets and even signs that defence exports may be on the rise once again in many states. The danger of a new race in nuclear weapons and missiles following the deployment of a national missile defence system in the United States clearly remains a serious prospect, as does the advent of a new arms race in outer space. New foreign threats will be found -- new so-called "rogue nations" will be identified along with new weapons capabilities from

enemies both new and old alike.

I remain optimistic, however, for the future of non-proliferation and disarmament efforts because I have faith that the overwhelming will of the people will ultimately lead national leaders in the direction of more enlightened policies of nuclear restraint, nuclear arms reductions, and new progress on the road to total nuclear disarmament. I urge you all not to relent in your own efforts to pursue these noble goals. The NPT Review Conference reminded us that there are grounds for hope after all on the question of nuclear disarmament. Let us not forget that message, nor the extent to which the achievement of such a goal depends upon popular support and understanding -- both of which have already been sustained through the collective efforts of funding organizations like yours. Together, let us get on with the work that lies ahead.