

Opening Address

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Ka hao te rangatahi: A Pacific Way to Disarmament

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Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa. I wish to begin today by extending this Maori greeting three times -- to honour the distinguished Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, for her vision and leadership in the field of disarmament and for her government's assistance in organizing this event today; to the Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control, the Hon. Matt Robson and the other distinguished speakers who will address this meeting; and to welcome other participants who have come from different countries to join the government and people of New Zealand in this collective reaffirmation of the goals of disarmament and the role of the U.N. in achieving them.

Over the last 13 years, the UN's Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific has held numerous meetings on regional and international security issues -- this, however, is the first such meeting to take place in New Zealand. This is an especially appropriate setting for this event, given that disarmament has long been part of this country's national identity, and the focus of a consistent national policy.

I am particularly pleased that representatives of many of the smaller island states in the South Pacific are able to join us today, for their support for disarmament -- especially nuclear disarmament -- is well known and respected throughout the world. The UN's respect for regional arrangements is enshrined in its Charter and our cooperation with regional and subregional organizations has been mutually beneficial and reinforcing.

Each region has its own uniqueness and hence its own special contributions to make to the cause of advancing global disarmament goals, and the Asia/Pacific region is surely no exception. In the eyes of many, the names of two cities -- Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- define the beginning and the end of the sad nuclear history of this region. Yet for many others, this history has been punctuated by additional names, including -- Bikini Atoll; Enewetak; Johnston Atoll; Christmas Island; Rongalap; Mururoa; Fangataufa; Monte Bello; Emu Field; Malden Island; and Maralinga. Clearly, a region with such a legacy -- with such tragic human and environmental costs, and with such legitimate security concerns -- has much to teach the world about the harsh realities of the global nuclear threat.

In light of this history, it is highly appropriate that New Zealand would serve as the venue of this gathering today. For it is truly a country that has remained steadfast in its commitment to advancing key disarmament goals not just throughout the region, but across the globe --

- It has championed the continuing effort to eliminate nuclear weapons from the entire southern hemisphere.
- It has worked with its partners in the "New Agenda" coalition (NAC) to put new life into global efforts in the field of nuclear disarmament and the results of its efforts are plain for all to see in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.
- It has championed for many years the international effort not just to stop nuclear testing in the South Pacific, but to conclude and bring into force a fully Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.
- It is a party to the Raratonga Treaty creating a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the South Pacific and has lent its support to the conclusion of the Bangkok treaty, creating such a zone in Southeast Asia.
- It is working constructively to curb international trafficking in small arms and light weapons.
- It has the great honour of being the only state that has a minister-level post dedicated to "disarmament."
- And it has shown the way in establishing a genuine partnership with non-governmental peace and disarmament groups and members of the public in New Zealand.

New Zealand, as do many states throughout this region, recognizes that disarmament is a cross-cutting issue. This means that disarmament's dividends are shared throughout society, just as the work needed to achieve them must also be supported by society at large. This is as true in the case for avoiding nuclear war as it is in the case for greater multilateral cooperation in reducing the threat from certain conventional weapons. Although the Cold War ended over a

decade ago, we are seeing disturbing signs that both arms expenditures and arms transfers are once again on the rise -- to levels approximating to 90 percent of Cold War expenditure.

To shed more light on these activities, the Department of Disarmament Affairs has for many years maintained the Conventional Arms Register and continues to promote international use of its "standardized instrument for the reporting of military expenditures." I would like to take this occasion today to encourage all states in this region that have not yet done so to participate in these important confidence-building measures. Full and consistent use of these tools will help enormously in defining the scope of the challenges ahead, and in ensuring an informed public -- the key to all effective disarmament and arms control efforts.

The need for greater international cooperation is particularly urgent in the field of small arms, given the catastrophic consequences that have resulted from illicit trafficking or excessive stockpiling of such weapons. In recent months, I have had the honour of speaking at regional gatherings held in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia in preparation of regional positions with respect to the conference next July at the United Nations on illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. There is no country in the Asia/Pacific region that remains untouched by this problem and the potential for constructive cooperation both at the regional and global level remains high. The threat to good governance, law and order, and the very institutions of democracy from this threat has been all too evident. I hope that today's meeting will help to revitalize national and international efforts to take the profits out of the proliferation of such weapons, to reduce excess stocks of such arms through their destruction rather than their export, and to promote rapid disarmament, demobilization and re-integration measures at the conclusion of armed conflicts. In July this year, the Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons must conclude with a strong Programme of Action with national, regional, and global measures to combat this problem.

Cooperation with non-governmental organizations is not just desirable, but essential to the success of many of these efforts. If we truly wish to make disarmament a sustainable objective of national policy and international action, it is vital to ensure that initiatives in these areas are deeply rooted in society. Civil society must not be simply a catchphrase, but a solid foundation upon which to base actions at the governmental and inter-governmental levels.

Those who understand that disarmament is a realistic response to international security threats recognize the extent to which success in addressing these threats will depend upon a growing role from younger generations. The United Nations, in response to a resolution recently adopted by the General Assembly, is now undertaking a two-year study on disarmament and non-proliferation education, a study that I am sure will help governments and educators around the world to give this challenge greater attention in their public policies and their academic curricula.

Ladies and gentlemen, with these brief introductory remarks, I will now conclude so that you can begin your deliberations. I am confident that your work over the next few days will produce some concrete practical suggestions on how people, governments, and international organizations can

work together to achieve greater progress in the field of disarmament. Please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting, and my deepest respects for the level of attention you are giving this most important issue.

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