

Opening Remarks

DISARMAMENT IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

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**Panel Discussion on *Disarmament in Conflict Prevention*
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Today's panel will focus not on two subjects -- disarmament and conflict prevention -- but one: disarmament *in* conflict prevention. This distinction has profound significance for the United Nations. We will see today how disarmament and conflict prevention are mutually-reinforcing means to serve international peace and security.

Many observers and practitioners in world affairs customarily treat disarmament and conflict prevention as parallel rather than synergistic subjects. To them, disarmament is simply the technical act of eliminating specific weapons, while conflict prevention involves action to address the deeper roots of conflict and the various options available to national leaders and international organizations to remedy them.

Yet people have been getting smarter about disarmament, and Secretary-General Kofi Annan deserves great credit for teaching them. He stated in his report last year on the "Prevention of Armed Conflict" that "conflict prevention lies at the heart of the mandate of the

United Nations."¹To achieve this goal, he added, required mobilizing "the collective potential of the United Nations system" -- literally the entire UN family.

Then he pointed out how disarmament treaties help by promoting the rule of law. He noted how transparency arrangements serve to reduce the risk of misunderstandings that lead to conflict. He described how "weapons for development" programmes -- involving the collection of surplus arms in exchange for community-based development incentives -- have been helping to prevent conflict both in "conflict-prone" and "post-conflict" societies. He also stressed the need to include disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DD&R) mandates in peacekeeping and peace-building operations.

This report and other such statements show how disarmament has evolved from a dry, technical field into a subject with profound implications for the UN system. It has become a classic cross-cutting issue -- a collective good, with real benefits for everyone. Disarmament saves money. It reduces threats to refugees, women, and children. It alleviates threats to the environment. It reduces the incidence and the effects of armed conflict. And by so doing, it helps foreign investment, economic growth, and trade.

These are just some of the important reasons why efforts are now underway inside the United Nations to "mainstream disarmament" -- that is, to ensure that virtually every component of the UN system understands what disarmament is all about, how its successes pay dividends for all, and why disarmament deserves much greater attention as a means to advance the full gamut of the principles and objectives of the Charter.

Yet despite these many attractions of the "disarmament dividend," and the common-sense proposition that conflicts are better prevented than cured, significant obstacles remain in reaping such benefits. While many observers continue to ignore or to doubt the contributions of disarmament to conflict prevention, some international conferences over the past decade have fallen into a similar syndrome. This was surely apparent at the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which ignored the question of how excessive military expenditures and over-armament were contributing to under-development -- a central question addressed at the 1987 International Conference on Disarmament and Development.

Yet the potential for progress is astonishing, even with respect to alleviating threats arising just from small arms and light weapons. Starting with the Mali initiative a decade ago, practical disarmament measures have shown their potential to address grave security threats arising from such weaponry. Last year, the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons exposed the human and economic costs of such weaponry for millions of people around the world. Participants at that Conference recognized that curbing this illicit trade would contribute to long-term development goals, to strengthening the rule of law, and to helping poor communities to improve the quality of their lives and to work their way out of poverty.

Today, our panellists will offer a three-dimensional view of the challenge of disarmament in

conflict prevention. We will hear from distinguished representatives of two Member States, from two experts within the UN, and from a senior representative of an NGO in this field. We are honoured to have them all with us today to explore this exciting new concept, the concept of disarmament ***in*** conflict prevention.

¹ A/55/985-S/2001/574, 7 June 2001.