

Opening Remarks

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Panel Discussion on
Multilateral Disarmament After the Iraq War
*On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the
First Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament*
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Welcome to this special Panel Discussion on “Multilateral Disarmament After the Iraq War,” organized by the UN’s Department of Disarmament Affairs. This is a special occasion indeed, since the recent war in Iraq has profound implications for the UN and for the rule of law, implications that have inspired an ongoing debate on a host of security issues, including the vital issue of how the world community should respond to challenges to disarmament norms. As we ponder the future shape of the global security order, it is relevant to recall another significant historical event -- the 25th anniversary of the first Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament, or SSOD-I.

It is not unusual for international legal regimes to be the object of critical scrutiny and the legal order established in the decades after World War II is surely no exception. Were the

treaties and conventions on arms limitation and disarmament only valid for a bipolar Cold War situation? Can the unilateral actions of a sole superpower effectively sustain this legal order and prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction? Is non-proliferation -- implemented using the military tactics of counter-proliferation and pre-emptive war -- a viable security policy in a world with asymmetrical power balances, a world where there may be growing incentives to acquire weapons of mass destruction?

These and many other questions relating to the role of the United Nations will be debated in the months and years ahead. For us in the multilateral disarmament field, there is much we can learn about the road ahead for multilateral disarmament from examining our fortunes along the road we have left behind. Though the goals of disarmament have obviously not been fully achieved -- let us consider some of the key features of SSOD-I, for herein lie many of the most fundamental principles and tools that the world will need in its journey to disarmament -- the "foundation of an international disarmament strategy."

The initiative to convene SSOD-I came from the Non-Aligned Movement and the summit those countries held in 1976 in Colombo. I am particularly happy to see Amb. Carlos Ortiz de Rozas -- the towering figure of SSOD-I -- present here today.

The Final Document of SSOD-I, remains astonishingly relevant to circumstances today. I would go so far as to describe this document as the very Constitution of Multilateral Disarmament -- for it set forth the enduring principles to guide a grand collective enterprise of the world community and created enduring institutional structures to pursue them.

The mood reflected in this document was a blend of frustration, apprehension, and determination -- *frustration* at the lack of progress on disarmament, *apprehension* over the consequences for all humanity of further setbacks, and *determination* to persist in efforts to achieve its vital goals. Needless to say, such sentiments are widely held today.

The Final Document established what it called the "ultimate goal" of general and complete disarmament, a term that allowed for the retention of a limited number of weapons to protect legitimate security concerns of citizens, to maintain domestic order, and to fulfill international commitments. The document treated "nuclear disarmament," by contrast, as the "highest priority" given the horrific human and environmental effects of such indiscriminate weapons. Today, unfortunately, a few States continue to mix these priorities, despite the consensus reached by States attending the 2000 NPT Review Conference to restore these priorities to their rightful order, as registered in the Final Document of that Conference.

Another recent trend is the alarming increase of global military expenditures, expected to rise above the \$1 trillion level this year. The Final Document termed the level of military spending in 1978 a "colossal waste of resources." The same words are even more applicable today, and even more tragic, as half the world continues to live in dire conditions of chronic poverty -- conditions

that only give rise to authoritarian regimes, rising domestic violence, and new breeding grounds for terrorists. The Document urged not just the reduction of such spending, but also the re-investment of such financial and technological resources into efforts to alleviate these conditions.

With respect to nuclear weapons, the Document minced few words in clarifying that disarmament remained the most urgent priority -- its description of non-proliferation efforts as an “imperative” related closely to its recognition of the damage that proliferation would do to achieving disarmament goals. It also endorsed efforts to reduce nuclear dangers pending the achievement of nuclear disarmament, but left no doubt that these offered no substitute for the actual elimination of nuclear weapons -- a point often lost in discussions of various public policies of managed proliferation and counter-proliferation.

Nuclear disarmament thus emerges in this Document not as some abstract goal, but an aim that is achievable in the real world, given sufficient political will and effective instruments of implementation. The Document emphasized, for example, the vital importance of verification and full compliance -- two very relevant themes today. It warned of the need to control against “qualitative” improvements in weaponry. It underscored the pernicious effects of certain doctrines, especially the doctrine of nuclear “deterrence or doctrines of strategic superiority” -- a warning as timely now as it was 25 years ago. It called for the elimination not just of nuclear weapons but also their delivery vehicles. In addition, the document urged a comprehensive ban on nuclear tests.

While nuclear disarmament was its clear priority, the Final Document also addressed the need for greater controls over conventional arms, and the need to prohibit those that are especially inhumane. It affirmed the right of States to possess conventional arms for legitimate defence purposes. Reductions should occur, moreover, “based on the principle of undiminished security of the parties with a view to promoting or enhancing stability at a lower military level.”

In reading this Document, one also discovers how far-sighted it was in anticipating the need to deal with emerging weapons technologies, including specifically the need to prevent an arms race in outer space, the need for a radiological weapons convention, and the need to prevent the development of “other weapons of mass destruction.”

I will not address all the details of the organizational machinery created as a result of SSOD-I, but do wish to say that this “disarmament machinery” remains largely intact, though suffering -- as the Secretary-General has observed -- from conditions of “rust” due to the lack of political will to make more or better use of it. We should not blame the architects of SSOD-I for the subsequent failure of States to use and to maintain the machinery they created.

We should instead look to new avenues to rekindle the political will -- described at SSOD-I as the “decisive factor” -- to revitalize this machinery and the principles for which it stands. Here too, the Final Document offers relevant insights as to how this could be done. It placed special

emphasis on the role of civil society. It envisaged the forging of an “international conscience” rooted in world public opinion. It called upon the UN Centre for Disarmament -- the predecessor of DDA -- to “increase contacts with non-governmental organizations and research institutions in view of the valuable role they play in the field of disarmament.” This is precisely what we have been doing for several years, are doing today, and shall continue to do.

The Final Document also emphasized the importance of public education about disarmament and the need for the UN to disseminate information on the global armaments race and measures needed to halt and reverse it. We are making some progress in these areas -- the Secretary-General has recently transmitted to the General Assembly a significant study by an expert group on this subject and there will be more progress in this area in the years ahead. As the Final Document indicated, the United Nations “has a central role and primary responsibility” in the field of disarmament -- and this too remains the view of the overwhelming majority of its Member States.

So our panel today is meeting in the context of this rich and complex history of achievements and set backs, which together have enormous bearing upon the disarmament issues we will face after the Iraq War. To address the specific implications further, we have an impressive list of speakers who will examine this question from several different perspectives. I welcome all participants in this event today and hope they will continue to work in the months and years ahead to bring us all closer to fulfilling the great vision outlined in SSOD-I.