

The United Nations and Nuclear Disarmament

by

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I would first like to thank our distinguished moderator, Lloyd Axworthy, for his gracious introduction and to express my admiration for his long government service on behalf of the United Nations and nuclear disarmament. I also wish to thank the Global Security Institute, the Middle Powers Initiative, and their joint programme -- the Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament -- for organizing this event, and the Liu Centre for providing this delightful venue.

The United Nations performs a number of functions concerning nuclear disarmament. They include a deliberative function, a recommendatory function, a research function, a negotiating function, a treaty function, an enforcement function, and an education function.

First, the deliberative function. The United Nations has two deliberative bodies -- the General Assembly with its First Committee, and its subsidiary organ, the Disarmament Commission. The issue of nuclear disarmament has been at the top of their agendas ever since they came into existence. In recent years, the General Assembly has been adopting a number of

resolutions on nuclear disarmament – including, for example, a resolution calling for a new agenda for nuclear disarmament, proposed by the member states of the New Agenda Coalition; a resolution trying to lay out a path to total nuclear disarmament, introduced by Japan; a resolution endorsing the ICJ advisory opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons; and other resolutions promoting nuclear-weapons-free zones around the world, to name a few. In fact, the First Committee this year adopted 20 draft resolutions on nuclear disarmament out the total of 47 resolutions.

While these resolutions were not always compatible with each other, many were adopted without a vote or with a substantial majority. In this year's Committee, an effort was initiated by American and European delegations to reduce the number of resolutions, to enable a more focused debate, and to enhance the relevance of the actions of the First Committee. I hope the effort will bear fruit, because so many resolutions on nuclear disarmament remain unimplemented. Some cynics have even argued that the high number of resolutions was both the cause and the result of non-implementation of the resolutions. Yet because almost all the ingredients needed to promote nuclear disarmament can be found in the resolutions passed by the First Committee, the real issue concerns their implementation.

The UN's recommendatory function on disarmament issues is carried out by the General Assembly, the First Committee, and the Disarmament Commission. The General Assembly has also established an Advisory Board for making recommendations to the Secretary-General on disarmament matters. It consists of a little over twenty members from governments, research institutes, and non-governmental organizations around the world and was until recently headed by Ambassador Gryshchenko of the Ukraine, who has just become the Foreign Minister of that country. Its latest report included, for example, a recommendation to keep the expertise gained in the UNMOVIC in the U.N. Secretariat.

The United Nations also performs a research function, centered at UNIDIR -- the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, located in Geneva. Its latest work includes, for example, books, reports, and a respected journal – *Disarmament Forum* – which together offer in-depth analyses on subjects ranging from small arms to weapons of mass destruction, while also addressing both global and regional issues relating to disarmament. This year, one issue of *Disarmament Forum* was devoted to “Nuclear Terrorism.” UNIDIR has also just published two useful reference books, “A Handbook on Verification and Compliance” and “A Lexicon for Arms Control, Disarmament and Confidence-Building.”

The U.N.'s negotiating function in this field is undertaken in the Conference on Disarmament, also located in Geneva. The Conference successfully negotiated such treaties as the BWC, CWC, and CTBT. Over the last seven years, however, it has not been able to agree on a “programme of work” or to establish negotiating committees for a specific treaty or an agreement. Most recently, the current Chairperson, Ambassador Inoguchi, has informed me that a compromise is within reach that would include the establishment of four working groups to work on the cessation of fissile material production for weapons, the prevention of an arms race

in outer space, nuclear disarmament, and what are called negative security assurances – that is, commitments not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapons States. I very much hope this optimism proves to be true, because the world has been waiting too long for multilateral negotiations to move nuclear disarmament forward.

A unique treaty function has been given to the United Nations Secretariat: namely, to service the operation and deliberation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Even though it is not quite a United Nations conference, the NPT Review Conference and its preparatory committees convene in U.N. conference rooms with U.N. Secretariat services. The IAEA, meanwhile, is an independent, UN-affiliated organization responsible for verifying compliance with safeguards under the treaty. Frustrations are mounting over the lack of significant progress in nuclear disarmament -- and certain trends are even going backward.

The U.N.'s enforcement function is perhaps the hottest item of the day. Nuclear disarmament -- or the NPT itself for that matter -- has enjoyed decades without having to confront any serious breach of the treaty requiring enforcement actions. The Security Council had long shied away from the steps needed to achieve nuclear disarmament, even though Article 47 of the Charter authorized its Military Staff Committee to advise the Council on all questions relating to "the regulation of armaments, and possible disarmament." Then came the Iraqi and the North Korean nuclear-weapons revelations. On Iraq, the Security Council took strong steps adopting the mandatory resolution 687 and subsequent resolutions. The North Korean question was settled outside the UN 1994.

On the global spread of WMD, the Security Council – meeting in 1992 at the level of heads of state and government -- issued an agreed statement declaring the proliferation of all such weapons to be a threat to international peace and security. Though it was not a resolution, the statement nevertheless carried significant weight. Since then, the Council was faced with the question of enforcement of its Iraqi resolution, but had a very difficult time reaching an agreement on enforcement measures when it was faced with specific violations. Resolution 1443, which established UNMOVIC, was an outcome of such an agonizing process. I very much hope that the members of the Council will achieve unity on the difficult question of enforcement, because -- after all -- we need that unity to make multilateralism work.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan is more concerned about the well-being of multilateralism than anybody else. The inability of the Security Council to reach an agreement just before the war started in Iraq, the inability to stop the war in Iraq from starting, and the devastating bomb attack on U.N. headquarters in Baghdad -- all these recent events have terribly disturbed the Secretary-General. At the outset of the General Assembly this year, he expressed his great concern over the spread of unilateral and lawless use of force in the face of threats of weapons of mass destruction involving clandestine groups. He stated that,

it is not enough to denounce unilateralism, unless we also face up squarely to the concerns that make some States feel uniquely vulnerable, since it is those

concerns that drive them to take unilateral action. We must show that those concerns can, and will, be addressed effectively through collective action.

He went on to announce his intention to establish a High-Level Panel of eminent personalities to examine the current challenges to peace and security and to consider the contribution that collective action can make in addressing these challenges. This panel was just announced last Tuesday. The Secretary-General had such a sense of urgency that he asked the panel to meet within the next few weeks in New York and to report to him within the year. I trust that such a group of eminent persons will address the serious security challenges we face today and come up with powerful recommendations on how to strengthen multilateral answer to the new threats.

In the meantime, the Security Council is now engaged in an informal consultation about its role concerning proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. France, for example, had proposed the establishment of a "permanent corps of inspectors" under the Security Council to deal with future questions concerning WMD verification. I hope certain effective measures will come out of the current discussion to strengthen the international resolve to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

I also hope that parliamentarians around world will join in the discussion and promotion of multilateral means to prevent proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and to lead the world to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Parliamentarians, however, cannot accomplish such goals on their own – they require a strong foundation of support in civil society. And this brings me to what is surely one of the most important U.N. functions in the field of disarmament -- namely, education. It is through education that the world will ensure that leaders and citizens will have the knowledge and wisdom needed to address the many great challenges that lie ahead in disarmament. Recognizing the importance of this issue, the General Assembly asked the Secretary-General in the year 2000 to prepare a report on this subject, with the assistance of experts. The report he submitted in August 2002 identified many new ideas and strategies for progress at literally all levels of education.¹

This, in conclusion, offers a broad overview of what the United Nations is doing on behalf of nuclear disarmament. The United Nations is committed to work in earnest towards nuclear disarmament hand-in-hand with parliamentarians and with civil society around the world. I look forward to your advice and support as we forge ahead with this great cause.

¹ A/57/124, 30 August 2000