

**Statement before the First Committee
of the
General Assembly**

by

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My dear participants of the First Committee, I am both pleased and honoured to address you for the first time in my capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs. First of all, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, upon your selection to guide the work of this important Committee for the 58th session of the General Assembly. I also wish to congratulate the members of the bureau and pledge the fullest support of the Department of Disarmament Affairs to the work of the Committee. We look forward to assisting your efforts to ensure this will be a productive session.

Two years ago, just months after the tragic events of 9/11, the Secretary-General remarked in his Nobel Lecture that we have all entered the third millennium “through a gate of fire.” We now find ourselves confronting additional dangers – while some are new, and some are very old, each one of them is a common concern to all the Member States represented in this Committee.

This is particularly true with respect to the weapons that pose the potentially gravest threats to humanity, namely weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Much of this Committee's agenda over the years has focused on these highly deadly, indiscriminate weapons -- and until they are totally eliminated, concerns both inside and outside this Committee over the threats of these weapons will remain.

It should not be surprising that issues relating to nuclear weapons would once again figure prominently on our agenda. We may not be able to fully resolve all the disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control, and counter-terrorist issues that will arise about these such weapons. But I hope we may make progress -- at the end of our deliberations -- in promoting our common understandings about the nature and urgency of the challenges posed by such weapons and in agreeing on concrete and practical measures that will strengthen global norms against such weapons.

The terrorist events in Japan demonstrated several years ago that non-state actors could produce and use WMD -- and the events on 9/11 and the succeeding developments re-awoke the world of the horrific danger of terrorists acquiring any type of such weaponry. This has motivated governments around the world to pay closer attention to measures needed to eliminate such risks, though much work remains ahead to address the numerous persisting dangers.

Given the millions of combat fatalities and the enormous devastation that resulted from internal and international wars over the last century involving conventional arms -- some observers have questioned the world community's priorities in addressing threats to international peace and security. While WMD continue to pose the gravest dangers -- recognizing the consequences from the use of even a single atomic weapon -- major conventional weapons systems, small arms, light weapons, and landmines continue to account for untold civilian casualties each year. Fortunately, there has been new progress in recent years to curb the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The United Nations was a common venue for many of these efforts, and remains to be a focus of efforts to promote transparency and confidence-building, as seen for example in the Register of Conventional Arms, and the Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures.

In considering our common challenges and our tools available to address them across all these fields, the Committee should recall the advice of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who urged the General Assembly -- on its opening day this session -- not to "shy away from questions about the adequacy, and effectiveness, of the rules and instruments at our disposal." Given the urgent concern about the imminent spread of deadly weapons, it would not suffice merely to recite the norms of prohibition. But we need urgently to explore practical ways to strengthen international peace and security through multilateral cooperation. It was in this spirit that the Secretary-General also urged Member States to "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,” he added, “show that those concerns can, and will, be addressed effectively through collective action.”

As in any system of law, the various multilateral instruments and institutions in the fields of disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control depend upon three essential conditions. First they must be widely viewed and accepted as legitimate. Second, there must be compliance with the most vital norms and ways to monitor it. And third, there must be some credible means of enforcing such norms if and when they are violated. If any one of these conditions has not been adequately satisfied, we will continue to face difficulties in promoting multilateral cooperation and limiting the resort to unilateralism.

Consistent with the Secretary-General’s longstanding efforts for organizational reform, the Secretariat stands ready to assist ongoing efforts to improve the Committee’s deliberative process. The Secretariat, for example, has reduced the number of reports to the Committee by consolidating certain reports that share similar themes or objectives. At the end of the day, the Committee will produce draft resolutions, all or virtually all of which will likely be adopted by the General Assembly. My hope is that all of us will be able to look back at our reports, our resolutions, and our debates and say proudly that they helped to serve as collective means to promote concrete progress in achieving the goals of disarmament and international security within the mandate of this Committee.

In closing, let me echo the views expressed by many heads of state and government during the General Assembly’s general debate, in recognition of the important contributions of civil society in advancing virtually all the goals of the Charter. Whether the issue concerns disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control, or counter-terrorism -- each of these areas have benefited from constructive contributions from individuals and non-governmental organizations and I fully expect these contributions to continue. Let us keep both our doors and our minds open to receive such support in all our future work.

Please accept my best wishes for a productive session. Thank you.