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Opening Statement

by

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on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues**

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I am very grateful for the honour of opening this joint Conference of the United Nations and the Republic of Korea on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues, the fifth such conference and I am sure not the last. I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for its support and assistance in making this conference possible.

We are here with the participation of experts of diverse backgrounds, including government officials, diplomats from key countries, journalists, and scholars. The true value of this sort of gathering is in the free exchange of ideas and thoughts that may not necessarily reflect official policies, which are deliberated elsewhere in the UN disarmament machinery. Therefore I urge you to participate in this personal capacity and also to follow the so-called Chatham House Rule, which allows reference to the seminar on a non-attributable basis.

Today we are gathered here at the heart of the Far East, where the nuclear issue of North Korea has been haunting the entire world. Also, we are about to see, even this week, a new chapter of the Six-Party Talks as a follow up of Security Council Resolution 1718, which may testify to the usefulness of sanctions imposed by the world body. In this region, the situation is fluid and moving.

But this is not the only region faced with the challenge of nuclear non-proliferation. We face serious challenges in many corners of the world and, as a result, we have the NPT regime in crisis, if not unravelling. The North Korean issue alone has posed a range of questions that are most relevant to the viability of the NPT regime.

First of all, even with the most intrusive IAEA inspections, would we be able to detect cheating by North Korea? The Additional Protocol is an effective tool, but is it good enough to detect if not prevent a plan to use sensitive technology and materials for military purposes? How should we deal with the NPT withdrawal issue in the future, to deter other parties from leaving the treaty? Is the current NPT regime sufficiently effective to prevent other states from acquiring nuclear weapons? Or we have simply been lucky not to see the familiar prediction of President Kennedy materialize by now? Iran has remained inside the NPT while North Korea has opted to be outside. Does the international community have more leverage against those nations in one case than the other? If not, then the NPT regime itself has not proven adequate to prevent the emergence of additional states with nuclear weapons.

Secondly, are the current Six-Party Talks really achieving the objective of securing nuclear free Korean Peninsula? Or are they only successful in managing the proliferation of nuclear weapons? It seems the framework of the Six-Party Talks has itself become viewed as offering a panacea for the problem, when the world's should instead remain focused on the actual results of the talks. Should the Security Council or the UN Secretary-General take a more active role in dealing with this issue? Until recently, there seems to have been too much hesitation by the Security Council in dealing directly with nuclear non-proliferation issues, and too few interactions between the IAEA and the Security Council. But the issues about WMDs are directly related to the issues of international security and peace, on which the Security Council alone would be able to make coercive decisions. The thrust of many nuclear problems relates to the issue of security guarantees, which demands the international community to come up with over-all security arrangements involving countries in the regions concerned. And yet progress in this area has terribly lagged behind, as it has in the Middle East.

Thirdly, is there a parallel between what the EU3+3 have tried to achieve in Iran, and the 1994 the Agreed Framework, which some of us have decried for its defects? And even within the Six-Party Talks, an embryonic formula is forging that is similar to the package deal of the 1994. Has the case of North Korea given inspiration to the Iranians in its pursuit of nuclear ambitions? And has the India-US nuclear deal offered a new pretext for those states to criticize the double standard applied by the world's powerful nations, particularly the NWSs? Could the various proposed multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle be viewed as an additional step to further widen the inequality between the NWS and NNWS? What should be the price that NWS have to pay to obtain such additional steps, or is it fair to request the NNWSs to give up a part of the inalienable right for the sake of public interests?

These are only some of the issues that we have to address, and they have arisen out of merely a single regional dispute.

The political and diplomatic environment that surrounds nuclear issues right now is not conducive to an easy settlement of disputes. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has described the international community as sleepwalking on a path towards nuclear proliferation. At best, we are in the middle of a stalemate.

The UN "disarmament machinery" has been unable to achieve much progress in recent years, as the NPT Review Conference and the World Summit were not able to reach agreement on language addressing nuclear weapons or other

weapons of mass destruction. We are not, however, in short supply of some good ideas for moving forward – including many specific proposals that were offered by the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, as well as the International Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, chaired by Hans Blix.

Many have pointed to the “lack of political will” as the crux of the problem of stalemate – yet I would suggest that we need to go somewhat deeper into this and be more precise about what is needed to raise the priority of disarmament and non-proliferation on official public policy agendas. Political will does not come from nowhere – it must be accompanied by a well-designed strategy and sound judgement of political opportunity.

In the coming few years, we will see an excellent opportunity for the international community to test such political will, for several reasons.

First, next year would potentially enable us to make a fresh start of the agenda on disarmament and non-proliferation. We expect quite a few major changes in the political scenery, such as a new trend emanating from the last US mid-term congressional election, major change of course in the Middle East, and the changing of the guards at the United Nations with the new Secretary-General much more versed in the North Korean issue.

Secondly, the US presidential race for 2008 has already begun, and civil society groups have already started to prepare their agendas for that event. It is equally important for the international community to give some thought to what could be the next agenda in the years following US election. We also have to be mindful of upcoming elections in Russia, China and the Republic of Korea, as well as the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

Thirdly, the disarmament community seems to be more conscious of the danger of continuing failure in negotiation of disarmament. This sense of crisis helped to score some reasonable success at two review conferences in Geneva in November on the CCW and BWC. Next year will start a new review cycle on NPT, and I hope the eagerness in the disarmament community would bring much-needed moderation and the spirit of compromise at the Review Conference.

Therefore, the time is again ripe for a firm political will to emerge on disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.

I encourage all participants to adopt a “results-based” practical approach -- for only after we can agree on specific goals to pursue, can we best identify what is needed to achieve such goals. This is most appropriate if we pursue a fresh approach in the coming few years.

Here I believe civil society has an especially important role to play in holding governments accountable for fulfilling their commitments. Through their educational activities, advocacy, research, and publications, individuals and non-governmental groups can indeed help in mobilizing the elusive “political will” needed to convert good ideas into concrete results.

Clearly, the paths ahead are both political and diplomatic. Fortunately, the participants at this Conference have both the knowledge and experience needed to ensure that this will be a productive conference. Please accept my best wishes in the important work that lies ahead.