

# STATEMENT BEFORE THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the distinguished members of this Committee and am pleased to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your appointment to guide our work. I also wish to recognize the members of the Bureau and to assure you all of the fullest cooperation of the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the work ahead.

I know that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon closely follows the work of this Committee, and has stated his deep personal interest in revitalizing multilateral efforts in disarmament, non-proliferation, and the regulation of armaments, as well as the United Nations' own effectiveness in this area. If we can continue the spirit of goodwill and cooperation that I sense in this room today, I am optimistic that our session this year will indeed be a productive one.

Upon his election as President of the first General Assembly in January 1946, Paul Henri-Spaak called upon all delegations to remember, in advancing their own particular national interests, that these interests must, in his words, "take their place in the wider setting of the general interest." His advice remains sound, especially as we examine our challenging agenda today. To succeed, we must re-affirm our common purpose in strengthening international peace and security for present and future generations. We must ensure that our architecture rests on a solid foundation of multilateral cooperation and respect for treaty commitments.

As in the past, many of the world's deepest insecurities arise from threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. This is not surprising, since the very existence of nuclear, biological, and chemical arms entails threats or risks of use. We have seen some progress in recent years in building global norms against the proliferation and terrorist use of all such weapons. We must all work to strengthen existing instruments and promote the rule of law in these fields.

Yet when it comes to nuclear disarmament -- which Dag Hammarskjöld once called a "hardy perennial" at the United Nations -- progress has been slow and subject to setbacks. It is a harsh reality that today over half of humanity lives in countries that possess nuclear weapons. And it is a harsher reality that humanity as a whole continues to live in insecurity as a result. Some 26,000 nuclear weapons reportedly continue to exist, although because of limits on transparency, we do not know the precise number. Whether this estimate is too low or too high, the result suggests the great distance that remains to be travelled on the road to nuclear disarmament.

Step by step, the world must continue its historic journey to achieve this goal. Last month, signatories to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty adopted a Final Declaration after their Article XIV meeting, re-affirming the goal of bringing the treaty into force as soon as possible.

As stressed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and his predecessor Kofi Annan, and by many delegations and non-governmental groups, both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are vital to international peace and security. They are mutually reinforcing and even help to reduce risks of nuclear

terrorism -- for example, by strengthening controls over weapon-usable fissile materials.

Intensive efforts are underway today to resolve peacefully international concerns over nuclear activities in Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This year, the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference had a modestly successful first session. Consistent with their obligations under Security Council Resolution 1540, states are improving their ability to prevent the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors and additional states. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of states continues to seek the complete elimination of such weapons. The disarmament and non-proliferation norms, in short, are stronger than is often implied in newspaper headlines that ignore the faithful compliance by the vast majority.

The manufacture and proliferation of delivery systems, however, remain difficult problems, and there is no multilateral missiles treaty or even signs of one arising anytime soon. Last June, the third Panel of Governmental Experts on missiles commenced its work and I look forward to a successful outcome of the panel's work in June 2008.

The world has achieved much in establishing a fully global norm against biological and chemical arms, as perhaps best seen in the absence of states heralding such weapons as vital to their security interests. We witnessed a successful Sixth BWC Review Conference last December, the first meeting this year of the treaty's new review cycle, and the establishment of the Implementation Support Unit, operating out of the Geneva Branch of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. Parties to the CWC marked the treaty's 10th anniversary in many arenas around the world. Meanwhile, its membership has grown to 182 States Parties. The great tasks ahead include the achievement of universal membership and compliance with the destruction deadlines.

While the United Nations has been working for over six decades to *eliminate* all weapons of mass destruction, it has been working almost as long in *limiting and regulating* various types of conventional arms. I note in this respect that Article 11 of the Charter itself provides a mandate for the General Assembly to consider "the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments." Appropriately, these are undertaken in parallel, not in any arranged sequence -- as we tackle new challenges, the old ones must not be neglected.

Last year, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 61/89, which requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on the feasibility, scope and draft parameters for the establishment of a comprehensive, legally binding instrument establishing common standards for the international trade in conventional arms, and to submit these views in a report to the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has received an unprecedented 97 submissions. This large response has led to delays in processing the report, in light of the General Assembly's persistent efforts to rationalize its work by reducing the heavy volume of documentation and ensuring maximum brevity. Because Member States have indicated that it is essential for their views to be included in their entirety in the report, the Secretariat has had to publish it in two parts, the first of which has already been published and it includes those submissions that met the requirements on length. The second part will be published on 17 October, at the beginning of the thematic debate. These reports, as received and as permitted by Member States, are also accessible on the website of the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

The high number of submissions clearly shows the depth of interest among Member States in pursuing such a treaty, as does the large number of states that have expressed interest in being included in the Group of Governmental Experts to be established by the Secretary-General to assist him in drafting the report on the subject as requested by the General Assembly. While it is not possible to include every

interested Member State in this group, each delegation will have its own important contributions to make in considering this proposal. Here is an initiative that has also earned the active interest and support of groups throughout civil society, which also deserve credit for their efforts to eliminate landmines, cluster munitions, and inhumane weapons.

In this respect, I would like to note that the States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons will be considering the issue of cluster munitions at their meeting in November and the world community is looking forward to a positive outcome. It should also be noted that the States Parties celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention this year, and that they will hold their 8th meeting next month in Jordan.

With respect to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on illicit brokering, chaired by Mr. Daniel Prins of the Netherlands, contains several recommendations that I hope the First Committee will endorse. I would also like to note the efforts known as the “Geneva Process” to promote the monitoring and implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action. Involving both governments and non-governmental participants, this initiative has helped to place small arms issues on the list of UN priorities. The Security Council’s statement of 29 June this year on small arms also underscored the importance of this goal.

The United Nations Register of Conventional Arms serves to improve the transparency of national data on imports, exports, and the production of seven categories of major conventional arms. I hope the First Committee will acknowledge its importance and call upon all states to contribute their own data to this useful database. The Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures is another initiative promoted by the Office for Disarmament Affairs – use of this instrument by all states is a worthy goal meriting the support of this Committee.

Some disarmament-related work at the United Nations, such as verification, applies to diverse types of weapons. I am pleased that the Panel of Governmental Experts on Verification in all its Aspects was able to reach agreement on a report this year with 21 recommendations, and I commend the panel’s chairman, Mr. John Barrett of Canada, for producing this useful report.

The Open-ended Working Group on convening a fourth Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament also had a productive year, concluding three one-week sessions that shed light on the depth of support that exists for this initiative among the Member States, while also identifying specific issues that will need further deliberation. I wish to thank Ambassador Alfredo Labbé of Chile for his competent chairmanship of this group.

Within the UN disarmament machinery, the Conference on Disarmament remains the world’s single multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament. While it has once again been unable to agree on a substantive programme of work, many participants and outside observers noticed that it conducted its deliberations in a generally positive atmosphere, demonstrating strong support for the commencement of negotiations on a fissile material treaty. I wish to salute the important efforts by the six Presidents of the CD this year for their efforts to fulfil its historic negotiating mandate. The next P-6 will certainly have fertile ground on which to work at the start of next year’s session.

Another part of this machinery – the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters – concluded its 2007 session with a report on “emerging weapons technologies, including outer space aspects.” The report drew specific attention to dangers associated with rapid advancements in the field of bio-technology, as well as the growing risks to the peaceful uses of outer space. The latter was especially timely, given that 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of the Outer Space Treaty and the 50th anniversary of the launching of Sputnik.

The board's report this year encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to raise public awareness of disarmament and non-proliferation issues, including through initiatives in the field of education. On this issue, I am pleased to announce that the Office for Disarmament Affairs will soon be launching a "Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education" portal on the UN's award-winning *Cyberschoolbus* – a educational website to help young people and their teachers to understand global issues. This launch will take place on 15 October and I invite all interested delegations to attend.

I believe the new United Nations Disarmament Yearbook will also prove to be a useful research and educational resource both inside and outside the organization. Meanwhile, the United Nations Programme of Fellowships on Disarmament continues to receive acclaim – we have now trained over 700 young officials in this field from countries throughout the world, in literally all inhabited regions. I am pleased to see several of these alumni here in this hall this morning.

Although this Committee addresses global issues, over the years it has also recognized the crucial role that regional organizations and local initiatives can play in advancing global disarmament norms. Regional nuclear-weapon-free zones are only one case in point, and last year the world witnessed the establishment in Central Asia of the first such zone entirely north of the Equator. Efforts must continue to encourage the nuclear-weapon-states to adhere to the relevant protocol, as well as the protocols to the treaties establishing other such zones.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has helped to promote the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 – by advancing non-proliferation and counter-terrorism goals at the regional level through workshops and seminars in China, Ghana, Peru, Jamaica, and most recently, in Jordan.

The Office also coordinates the work of the three United Nations Regional Centres for peace and disarmament in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. I am pleased to announce that following the signature last July of our agreement with the government of Nepal, we will be able to start operating the Asia/Pacific Centre from Kathmandu early next year. I have high regard for the dedicated professionals who work at these Centres, which – despite their frequent financial hardships – are able to produce concrete benefits for the regions, local governments, and indeed the citizens throughout these regions. These include progress in curbing the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. I thank all Member States that have supported the work of these centres, both financially and politically, and call upon all other states to join in this support.

I wish now to express my deep gratitude for the support that Member States have given to the Office for Disarmament Affairs in its first year. As a result of the Secretary-General's initiative, this Office is part of the mainstream of the UN policy process and will continue to operate within the mandates of the former Department. I will do all that I can as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to live up to the confidence that the General Assembly has voiced in this reform initiative, as expressed in its Resolution 61/257.

No disarmament review would be complete without a tribute to the many contributions from individuals, groups, and networks in civil society. Through their countless activities, they are constructing a solid political foundation for future progress in this field. These individuals and groups help both in mobilizing support throughout society for disarmament, and in informing the deliberations going on throughout the UN disarmament machinery. We continue to count on their support and inspiration.

In closing, please accept my best wishes for a productive session. This year, let us reaffirm our common purpose to work constructively for disarmament and arms limitation. Let us begin today.