

**Panel of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly**  
*“Current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament  
and the role of the respective organizations”*

Statement before the First Committee  
of the  
General Assembly

by

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I am very privileged today to participate in this panel together with four distinguished visitors to the First Committee –Rogelio Pfrter, the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Tibor Tóth, the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO); Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament (CD); and Gustavo Zlauvinen, Representative of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the United Nations.

The title of this panel refers to “the role” of these respective organizations, when in fact they play a wide variety of roles in advancing multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation goals. In my remarks, I will focus on the historical context for this important work, in particular on the extensive cooperation that the United Nations has maintained over many years with each of these autonomous international organizations.

As we grapple with the crises of the present and confront future challenges, we should recognize that all of our work this session is part of a long history of efforts to advance global disarmament and arms control norms, and thereby strengthen international peace and security. The goal of prohibiting the use of the deadliest and most indiscriminate types of weaponry has a legacy dating back many centuries – it even appears in the ancient Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. The idea of creating special international organizations to confront such challenges, however, made its initial appearance in the Middle Ages, when Pierre Dubois proposed the creation of an international organization to deal with the problem of war. In Europe, Dante and Erasmus explored this idea further, as did the duc de Sully, Émeric Crucé, and the abbé de Saint Pierre in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Across the Atlantic, William Penn would later become one of the first to explore a disarmament role for an international organization, and many more proposals would follow.

These efforts led eventually to the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, and later to the establishment of the League of Nations and the United Nations. One of the UN’s first actions was to consider a United States proposal – introduced in 1946 by Bernard Baruch -- to create an “International Atomic Development Authority” to be entrusted with all phases of the development and use of atomic energy. In his famous “Atoms for Peace” speech seven years later in the General Assembly, President Eisenhower proposed the creation of an international “Atomic Energy Agency”, a proposal that came to fruition in 1957. In 1961, the United States and the Soviet Union jointly endorsed a programme for general and complete disarmament, which included a proposal to establish an “International Disarmament Organization” that “should be created within the framework of the United Nations.”

The world’s inability to reach a consensus on an agreement on general and complete disarmament, however, led to an alternative approach, often called “partial measures”, involving the negotiation of treaties or the launching of other ad hoc initiatives on more specific issues and types of weapons. This led to the creation of some dedicated agencies, including all of the inter-governmental organizations represented on our panel today.

This growth of international organizations devoted to specific types of weapons has not rendered the United Nations obsolete – to the contrary, it has strongly reinforced its own vital roles. The UN is indispensable in achieving a synergy among the diverse activities of international organizations throughout the world, at both the global and regional level. There is in our world much work to do that is highly technical and should be undertaken as free as possible from political interference. Yet there is also a need to ensure that our collective

work on global disarmament challenges is coordinated and integrated, so that we do not find ourselves mired in duplication of effort, or even worse, working at cross-purposes.

Furthermore, all of the work of the United Nations – including its advocacy initiatives, its work with non-governmental organizations, its efforts to educate the public, its many regional and sub-regional workshops promoting the implementation of agreed multilateral norms, its efforts to promote the rule of law and universal membership in key multilateral treaties, its ongoing deliberations of the state of existing and emerging disarmament initiatives, and through the Security Council, its role in enforcing agreed norms – in all these areas, progress at the United Nations serves to benefit the work of these other disarmament-related organizations.

This is all very much consistent with one of the most fundamental purposes of the United Nations as stated in the Charter, which is to be a “centre for harmonizing the actions of nations” in pursuit of their common ends. It is also consistent with the words of the Final Document of its first Special Session on Disarmament -- adopted in this very room in 1978 – in which the General Assembly underscored that the United Nations has “a central role and primary responsibility in the sphere of disarmament.”

The commitment of the United Nations to each of the entities represented on our panel today is profound and registered at the highest level – it also extends to international organizations that are not represented here today.

- On 22 January, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent a personal message at the opening of the 2007 session of the Conference on Disarmament, stressing that he has “staked out as one of my priorities the mission to invigorate disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.”
- On 17 September, he sent a personal message – which I was honoured to read – upon the opening of the fifty-first session of the IAEA’s General Conference, underscoring that “We must redouble our efforts to revitalize the international disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, and rid the world of nuclear weapons.” The UN has long supported efforts by the IAEA to encourage States to adopt the Additional Protocol, to strengthen physical security over nuclear material and facilities, to promote the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, to ensure that nuclear energy is used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and to promote the adoption of comprehensive safeguards by non-nuclear-weapon states party to the NPT. We have provided administrative and substantive support to the parties to that treaty ever since its entry into force in 1970.
- Also on 17 September, the Secretary-General sent a message – which I also read on his behalf – to the fifth conference on facilitating the entry into force of the CTBT, where he called for “persistent efforts on the part of States and civil society” to achieve that historic goal. The Office for Disarmament Affairs and its regional centres for peace and disarmament in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the Asia/Pacific, have actively worked with the CTBTO Preparatory Commission to promote the entry into force of this treaty.
- Later that month, the Secretary-General personally addressed the High-Level Meeting on the Tenth Anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention, a commemorative

event that was marked in many other UN arenas in activities jointly arranged by the OPCW and the Office for Disarmament Affairs, which has also worked to promote universality and full implementation of that convention.

Within the Counter-Terrorism-Implementation Task Force of the UN, and to assist MS with the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the Office for Disarmament Affairs is working together with several international organizations to develop a single comprehensive bio-incident database and to update the technical guidelines and procedures established by the General Assembly in 1987 for investigations in case of allegations of use of biological warfare agents.

Of course, our cooperation with other international organizations is by no means limited to those dealing with weapons of mass destruction. We work with local, sub-regional, and regional organizations on literally a daily basis to promote efforts against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The Office for Disarmament Affairs is the coordinating focal point of efforts within the larger inter-agency UN family to promote this goal. Our efforts against this illicit trade have achieved widespread recognition, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our Office also leads the “Working Group on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation” to improve coordination between the UN and regional and other intergovernmental organizations. This collaboration covers a wide gamut of activities, ranging from small arms to weapons of mass destruction, including efforts to promote implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has also been working with other organizations to promote norms against inhumane weaponry. The Geneva Branch of the Office for Disarmament Affairs works closely with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian De-mining, while also assisting States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in pursuing the elimination of inhumane weapons. In our official statements and in meetings, the United Nations is also supporting efforts to establish norms governing cluster munitions. It is a poignant irony that today -- so long after the *Ramayana* opposed the use of inhumane weapons -- we are still grappling with this problem.

Looking ahead, I see great prospects for cooperation between all international organizations involved in disarmament. I see a trend toward joint partnerships, greater information sharing, mutual recognition of the work of our various organizations, new initiatives to promote public education, expanded collective efforts at the regional and sub-regional levels, jointly produced publications and innovative media approaches, and many other ways that we can work together to achieve our historic common aims.

I would like to conclude by saying that the future of the world lies not in international organizations, but in international *organization*. Our goal must be to deepen the scope of cooperation among our member states in the pursuit of agreed multilateral goals. International organizations are not an end, but a means to achieve such goals. In this light, I welcome the thoughts of all of our panellists today on how the United Nations can deepen this trend of positive cooperation over the years ahead.