

Opening Remarks

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Reykjavik Revisited: Steps Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons

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It is a great honour for me to speak with you today on my favourite subject: global nuclear disarmament. I congratulate all who participated in the launching of what is now being called the “Hoover plan”. Consistent both with the spirit of Reykjavik, and the personal commitment of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to revitalize disarmament efforts, you have recognized the need to bring this subject back to the level of decision makers, where it belongs. I also salute your efforts to identify what specifically will be needed to fulfil this vision.

Nuclear disarmament is of course one of the oldest goals of the United Nations. While “disarmament” appears twice in the Charter, the goal of eliminating “weapons adaptable to mass destruction” was identified in the General Assembly’s first resolution, adopted in 1946. It has since been the subject of literally hundreds of resolutions reinforcing this goal. I believe this interest at the United Nations in nuclear disarmament stems from a sober recognition by its member states of the horrific consequences from the use of even a single nuclear weapon, as well as a shared belief that the elimination of such weapons offers the most effective and reliable way to prevent any such use.

Ladies and gentlemen, a nuclear war would jeopardize literally all the United Nations seeks to achieve. As summarized by Philip Noel-Baker in his lecture upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1959, “Disarmament is not a policy by itself; it is part of the general policy of the UN. But it is a vital part of that policy; without it, the UN institutions can never function as they should.” In his own Nobel peace lecture in 1950, Ralph Bunche put it this way, “There is only suicidal escape, not freedom, in the death and destruction of atomic war.”

We all know that nuclear disarmament is often dismissed as a naïve or utopian goal. Yet in the eyes of much of the world, the *alternatives* to disarmament appear as truly unrealistic or worse, inherently unstable or outright dangerous. These include nuclear deterrence, reliance on non-proliferation alone, pre-emption, indefinite nuclear arms control, peace through regional balances of nuclear terror, and other such approaches that both realists and idealists now view as unsustainable.

Recognizing such scepticism, proponents of disarmament have sought to explain convincingly how global security, and the security of each nation, would be enhanced by the elimination of such weapons. Fortunately, there is no shortage of worthy steps to consider that have already been put forward in the international community to achieve this aim.

At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the parties agreed on thirteen steps to achieve nuclear disarmament. In June 2006, the international WMD Commission, chaired by Hans Blix, agreed on thirty recommendations dealing just with nuclear weapons. Other commendable initiatives include the work of the Canberra Commission, the Tokyo Forum, the New Agenda Coalition, the “Norwegian initiative”, as well as additional worthy proposals from civil society, including the recently updated “Model Nuclear Weapons Convention”.

Some steps can be taken unilaterally and some bilaterally, recognizing that the United States and Russian Federation reportedly possess some 97% of the world’s nuclear weapons. Other steps are required at the plurilateral and multilateral levels, given that nuclear disarmament remains a global goal. I congratulate you for underscoring the importance of the entry into force of the CTBT – the important work of the Preparatory Commission for the CTBTO will be crucial in verifying compliance with that Treaty and, I believe, in advancing both disarmament and non-proliferation goals.

While opinions may differ on the staging of disarmament, and who should do what and when, I would like to offer some propositions that I hope will assist your own consensus-building in this area.

You have already recognized that the goal is to eliminate nuclear weapons, not just to regulate them. Yet the proverbial “ultimate goal” is not nuclear disarmament. It is instead the elimination of *all* weapons of mass destruction, the reduction and control of conventional arms for limited national security and international peace enforcement purposes, and the strengthening of international institutions for the peaceful settlement of disputes (including mediation, arbitration, and adjudication). For almost fifty years, the United Nations has pursued these collective goals under the rubric of “general and complete disarmament”, which the NPT parties declared in 2000 as their ultimate goal. The UN Charter provides the foundation for these efforts, as do several multilateral treaties.

Progress on nuclear disarmament must proceed *hand in hand* with progress in these other areas. It must not be held hostage to the prior resolution of every conflict, the elimination of every other threat to security, or the dawn of world peace. To the contrary, disarmament has tremendous potential to *serve* international peace and security – it is not their by-product. As Dag Hammarskjold once said, “Disarmament is never the result only of the political situation; it is also partly instrumental in creating the political situation.”

To achieve this goal, policies of states must be congruent with their international commitments. States must accordingly adjust their policies, budgets, institutions, and regulations so that they are in line with the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. Yet we hear today only of programmes for nuclear weapon “stewardship”, not disarmament stewardship. We hear of institutional nuclear-weapon complexes, but not disarmament complexes. We hear of a “revolution in military affairs”, but no revolution in disarmament affairs. We hear of measures to reduce arsenals, but not of their relationship to treaty obligations. Frankly, we need to *hear* less, and *see* more congruence.

The world community has clearly indicated that four criteria are indispensable for disarmament to be undertaken securely. These include: *binding commitments* -- to ensure permanence; *irreversibility*, to prevent strategic nuclear surprises; *transparency*, to enhance confidence-building; and *verification*, to confirm the implementation of disarmament and to prevent cheating.

I urge you to reaffirm these standards. Meanwhile, you might want to consider the desirability of encouraging all states possessing nuclear weapons to issue a joint political declaration indicating their common intention to *seek to achieve* nuclear disarmament by a specific historic date. While not binding, such a declaration would help in designing and implementing national plans for disarmament. Agreement on such a “D-day” would be welcomed throughout the world, and would help in responding to critics who believe the nuclear powers have no intention of ever fulfilling their disarmament commitments.

In accordance with longstanding international expectations, reductions in conventional arms should accompany progress in nuclear disarmament, while increased investments are made in the machinery of enforcing peace. These should be reinforced by an intelligent media strategy, a dedicated programme to educate the public, and political initiatives to expand support from civil society and among governments. Disarmament efforts should also engage national legislators and mayors, recognizing that starting next year, most of the world’s population will be urban and that if nuclear weapons are ever again used, they will most likely be used against cities.

The entire world community would welcome real progress in nuclear disarmament, and any contributions you can make in achieving it. The United Nations will undoubtedly play many vital roles in advancing this goal -- in helping to sustain the global rule of law, in educating the public, in providing common forums for debate and for treaty negotiation, in conferring collective legitimacy, and in serving as the world's central means of enforcing agreed norms. I encourage your support for our efforts and look forward to hearing your views on how we can best move forward.