

Closing Remarks
Setting the Agenda for Nuclear Disarmament

By

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Excellencies, distinguished parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen. I am very grateful for this opportunity to deliver some closing remarks at this important conference on the prospects for achieving a world without nuclear weapons. I thank the Socialist Group of the European parliament for inviting me to speak, and am especially honoured given its long history of support for the cause of global nuclear disarmament. This support illustrates well the vitally important roles that parliaments and regional organizations have played and will continue to play in advancing disarmament and other multilateral goals.

Our event is taking place in a building that bears the name of Paul-Henri Spaak, who, as many of you know, was the first President of the UN General Assembly. Upon assuming that position in January 1946, he called upon all Member States—as they actively promote their own individual interests—to remember that these interests must, in his words, “take their place in the wider setting of the general interest.”

Today, we also find ourselves in a room bearing the name of Anna Lindh, whose life and tragic death have inspired continuing efforts to advance the cause of disarmament. Addressing the General Assembly in 2001, she made the following appeal: “We must join forces for multilateral disarmament. A world free from weapons of mass destruction would be a much safer world. Multilateral agreements contribute to security for the individual.”

I believe these two quotes from our distinguished predecessors provide a solid foundation for exploring the difficult challenge of “setting the agenda” for nuclear disarmament. We recognize how the advancement of the interests of all states also advances the interest of each state. And we understand the many ways that progress in disarmament serves to strengthen international peace and security.

Speaking at Harvard University on 21 October, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke of nuclear disarmament as a “global public good,” one of the most important and longstanding goals of the United Nations. At a conference organized three days later by the East-West Institute, he outlined a five-point proposal to advance this aim. I believe that his initiative offers a useful starting point for “setting the agenda” for global nuclear disarmament.

He called first for the full implementation of the duty in Article VI of the NPT to enter into good faith negotiations on nuclear disarmament, which could focus upon the negotiation of either a specific convention or a framework of reinforcing instruments. His second proposal aimed at encouraging the Security Council to commence deliberations on the security issues associated with the process of disarmament, as called for in the UN Charter. Third, he called for efforts by the international community to advance the “rule of law” in disarmament, including the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and commencement of negotiations without preconditions of a fissile material treaty. Fourth, he urged the nuclear-weapon-states to take certain actions with respect to accountability and transparency, including the publication of more data on holdings of weapons and relevant materials, as well as further details on concrete steps being taken to implement disarmament commitments. Lastly, he pointed to the need for several complementary measures to address related challenges of WMD terrorism, the elimination of other types of WMD, new progress in conventional arms control, and efforts to pursue new prohibitions in the fields of missiles and space weapons.

These proposals, of course, were in no way intended to be fully comprehensive or exhaustive. Nor did they attempt to synthesize or integrate all the many other worthy proposals that have surfaced in recent years in deliberations in the UN disarmament machinery, in governmental arenas outside the UN, or that have emerged from civil society. As I look over the sheer number and range of these various proposals, I see an *embarras de richesses*. Among the many dangers ahead, one must surely include an ever-growing proliferation of separate disarmament agendas, which all too often reflect the parochial interests of specific countries or groups of countries, rather than the common good or the collective international interest.

Amid this outpouring of recent initiatives, conflicting priorities inevitably emerge. Some states, groups of states, or non-governmental organizations want immediate progress in one particular area—such as nuclear non-proliferation—while others want a greater emphasis on nuclear disarmament. Some say regional or global peace is a prerequisite for real progress in disarmament. Some say that now is the time for an emphasis on progress on the bilateral level, especially the negotiation of deep reductions in the strategic nuclear stockpiles of the United States and Russian Federation, which possess well over 90 per cent of the world’s nuclear weapons. Still others point to the human and economic development costs of the production,

transfer, and use of a wide range of conventional weapons and point to the immediate need for greater progress in this area. The international community seems to have lost the sense of “common purpose” which not so long ago permitted the successful negotiation of a number of important agreements in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

In the past decade or so, unfortunately, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has been unable to commence negotiations on the many important items on its agenda precisely because of the inability of its members to reach a consensus on just such priorities. Some countries want to put nuclear disarmament first; some are demanding immediate negotiations on a fissile material treaty; and some want to pursue a treaty to prevent an arms race in outer space—though some states, of course, have shown more flexibility than others in pursuing such goals. The First Committee of the General Assembly is another multilateral forum that has been the site for similar disagreements over fundamental priorities, as perhaps best illustrated by the chronic pattern of deeply divided votes on resolutions dealing with nuclear disarmament—often, I must note, with NATO states voting *en bloc* either in opposition or in abstention to such resolutions.

I am not at all convinced that the difficulties encountered in those multilateral arenas are due to some inherent flaw in their own structures or rules, even acknowledging the continuing need for improvements in those areas. The main reason for the lack of progress rests instead with differences among policies of member states, and an apparent unwillingness of some states to compromise on their own perceived interests for the sake of achieving common ground.

Sometimes I fear that the world community is in danger of losing its bearings in this field. As frustrations and impatience continue to grow over the lack of greater progress in eliminating nuclear weapons, proposals beget counter-proposals, and we risk losing sight of our fundamental purposes. The Spanish philosopher, George Santayana, once wrote, “fanaticism consists in redoubling your effort when you have forgotten your aim.” In terms of disarmament, we are facing the danger of succumbing to a form of fanaticism that involves the determined pursuit of the particular interest over the global interest and shared ideals.

A worthy response to this syndrome is to recall what the world community has already agreed. The UN Charter identified two goals for its Member States to pursue with respect to weapons—disarmament, which the General Assembly later clarified to cover the elimination of all weapons adaptable to mass destruction, and the regulation of armaments, a goal that applied to conventional arms. Next year, the General Assembly will mark the 50th anniversary of the union of these goals in Resolution 1378, which identified the collective aim of “general and complete disarmament under effective international control.” The General Assembly, at its first Special Session on disarmament in 1978, agreed that that this would be the “ultimate objective” of the United Nations in this field.

Coupled with other universally-agreed multilateral goals in the Charter—especially the requirements for member states to pursue the peaceful resolution of disputes and to refrain from the threat or use of force—progress in implementing general and complete disarmament was intended to strengthen international peace and security as a whole. In words adopted at that first special session, disarmament was to proceed in such a manner that—at each stage in the reduction process—there would be “undiminished security at the lowest possible level of armaments and military forces.” This is indeed an essential element, which remains valid today. It means that enhanced security should be sought at lower, rather than higher, levels of armaments, and this requires fundamental changes in current defence doctrines.

We have, in short, a rather clear set of multilateral goals to pursue: WMD disarmament and conventional arms control, which are to be pursued simultaneously. It is in the realm of the selection of means to pursue these goals where we have witnessed the greatest proliferation of agendas.

This is, of course, not necessarily a bad development. Consider how far the world has come from the days—not so long ago—when opinion-leading commentators would routinely dismiss nuclear disarmament as a utopian goal or “fantasy”. The respected experts and political authorities who have participated in our conference today—along with countless others across the globe—have not just proven capable of envisioning a world without nuclear weapons. You have also addressed specific measures to help in actually achieving it.

You have avoided the easy temptation to avoid difficult issues, such as the ongoing debate over various methods for dealing with common threats posed by activities in the nuclear fuel cycle. While there is still no international consensus on how the world should address such threats, the world is without doubt making significant progress in at least clarifying the options that are available to achieve common goals. These goals relate to the collective interest in non-proliferation, promoting exclusively the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, enhancing physical security of nuclear facilities and materials, and ensuring that growing fuel cycle activities will not eventually become an obstacle to the achievement of global nuclear disarmament, while also ensuring that there will be no curtailment of scientific progress and technological advancement for legitimate purposes.

We all understand the risks that the dissemination of technical knowledge and the mounting production of weapon-usable fissile materials will pose for disarmament, especially in terms of satisfying the agreed standards of irreversibility, transparency, and verification—all essential in reducing the risk of future strategic surprises, a danger well recognized at this conference. As the Secretary-General stated in his address last October to the East-West Institute, “We should never forget that the nuclear fuel cycle is more than an issue involving energy or non-proliferation; its fate will also shape prospects for disarmament.”

The Conference has also explored the many ways that the European Union has been working to promote progress in both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation—a collective regional effort that has much to offer other regions as a model for future collaborative initiatives. There is widespread recognition in this region of the importance of the strictest possible controls over fissile materials, to guard against their acquisition by terrorists, to eliminate the risk of proliferation, and to advance the goal of nuclear disarmament.

We have also heard at this conference significant contributions from representatives of civil society—a sector that has consistently given its strong support for progress in both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. While many speeches about disarmament cite the need for greater political will, the burden of inspiring and sustaining that political will—through practical action—is often borne by individuals and groups in civil society. I am enormously encouraged to see the NGO community working with national governments, regional intergovernmental organizations, and

political parties to advance agreed, multilateral disarmament goals. Such work is helpful in bringing new ideas and vitality to deliberations inside governments, and is also vital in promoting deeper involvement and understanding among the general public.

Needless to say, all who care about the future of disarmament and non-proliferation are watching closely the developments leading up to the NPT Review Conference in 2010. We have made some welcome but modest progress so far in the work of the first two sessions of the preparatory committee for that event and all states parties recognize the importance of progress at the third session, which will occur early next May in New York.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of reaching an agreement at that session on an agenda and recommendations for the 2010 Review Conference. After the disappointing outcomes of the 2005 Review Conference and the World Summit that occurred the same year, the world clearly cannot afford another such setback in 2010. If the states parties adhere to their commitments to strengthen the review process, and to keep their focus on implementing their commitments made at the 1995 and 2000 Review Conferences, then I believe there will indeed be a basis for new progress over the two years ahead.

There are, to be sure, many specific issues to resolve between now and 2010. These would certainly include questions surrounding the nuclear activities in Iran and progress in negotiations regarding weapons programmes in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. There are also difficult challenges ahead concerning nuclear cooperation with states that are not parties to the NPT—including the granting of special benefits for non-parties, double standards, and the potential erosion of the global norm of full-scope IAEA safeguards. By 2010, I hope we will have witnessed substantial progress in bilateral strategic arms reductions between the United States and Russian Federation, which the entire world would welcome. And as proposed by the Secretary-General, I also hope the world will be witnessing greater cooperation among all the states possessing nuclear weapons, especially in the field of developing effective means of verifying disarmament commitments, in removing weapons from high-alert status, in abandoning first-use nuclear doctrines, and in enhancing the transparency over existing arsenals.

I would like to emphasize in particular the need for some sincere efforts to pursue the goal of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, in accordance with the Middle East resolution adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. The lack of progress in this area no doubt contributed to the disappointing outcome of the 2005 Review Conference. Given that the goal of creating such a zone has also been endorsed by the General Assembly in over 30 resolutions, typically without a vote, concrete steps toward its achievement would undoubtedly help in creating an auspicious environment for the NPT Review Conference in 2010. Needless to say, continued inaction would surely produce the opposite result.

In closing, I wish to commend the organizers of this conference, the Socialist Group of the European Parliament, for recognizing the importance of this issue of nuclear disarmament and for giving it the attention it so richly deserves. For disarmament to move forward, I believe it is essential for it to have the strongest possible network of support, both inside and outside governments. Serving effectively as bridges from governments and civil society, parliaments will have crucial roles to play in achieving this goal. They serve as forums for debate, for representing the view of local constituents, for holding governments accountable, and for approving funds for governmental activities. Cooperation among national parliaments is already strong and growing, and ultimately may well make the difference in marshalling the political will needed for the next important steps forward in disarmament, including those I have outlined today.

Please accept once again my thanks for the opportunity to speak today, and my very best wishes for all your important work that lies ahead in reinforcing and implementing a truly global agenda for nuclear disarmament.