

Remarks to the Panel of Governmental Experts on the Issue of Missiles in All its Aspects

by

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I am pleased to address this panel as it begins the final stage of its work on the challenging subject of missiles in all its aspects. I am doing so for many reasons.

First and foremost, I wish to commend you all for serving on this highly-qualified and experienced Panel. I know that this work has taken you away from your other responsibilities and that members of such panels seldom get much recognition for their work. I want to assure you that your work is appreciated and to thank you for your international public service.

My second reason for coming is to congratulate the Panel's chairman, my friend and distinguished colleague Santiago Mourão, for his own contributions both to this panel and to the previous missiles panel. I am sure he has earned the respect of all his fellow members for his substantive contributions and for steering your deliberations toward agreement on language that will be acceptable to all.

My third and perhaps most important reason for addressing you is to underscore the importance of the issues before you. I say this in part as a former diplomat from a country that abandoned its own long-range ballistic missile programme, and in part due to my current disarmament and non-proliferation responsibilities at the United Nations.

I am of course just one of many UN officials who have recognized the importance of the missile issue, including several Secretaries-General who raised this issue in their various Reports on the Work of the Organization—

- U Thant said in his 1964 report that “The reduction and elimination of vehicles for the delivery of nuclear weapons continues to be the key issue of general and complete disarmament.” In his 1971 report, he again returned to this theme, saying “What is needed is a halt in both the quantitative accumulation and qualitative sophistication of nuclear weapons and missiles, a reduction in their present numbers and the beginning of the process of their drastic reduction and eventual elimination.”
- In his 1998 report, Kofi Annan said, “I have urged those States to refrain from any further nuclear testing, to adhere immediately to the Test-Ban Treaty, to refrain from deploying nuclear weapons, and to freeze their weapons development programmes, as well as the development of missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.” In April 1999, he issued a statement drawing the world's attention to the lack of multilateral norms for missiles.
- Ban Ki-moon said in his own 2007 report that “Weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, as well as ongoing tests of delivery systems capable of carrying such weapons, continue to be of primary concern.”

Needless to say, the goal of eliminating missile delivery systems also appeared in the preamble of the NPT as well as in the Declaration adopted at the General Assembly's first Special Session on disarmament in 1978. This objective is also fully consistent with the UN's

longstanding ultimate goal in this field, namely, general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

It is in this deeper historical context that the full importance of the work of this Panel emerges into clear focus. This is the last of the three sessions of the third missiles Panel and I know that you still face some difficult work ahead in reaching a consensus on a report. My goal today is to underscore the importance of producing such a report—even if you are ultimately not able to reach a consensus on literally every “aspect” of the missile challenge.

The importance of moving forward in this field relates not just to historical events that occurred decades ago at the multilateral level, but also to more recent international developments. I am referring to the disappointing outcomes of the 2005 NPT Review process, the 2005 World Summit, as well as the deep divisions that remain in the UN disarmament machinery—specifically the UN Disarmament Commission, the First Committee of the General Assembly, and the Conference on Disarmament. I must add to this list the inability of the second Panel on missiles to adopt a consensus report.

This week, we can ill afford yet another failed effort to achieve a consensus. I therefore urge you to focus on the issues where you are clearly in agreement and endeavour, to the extent possible, to produce a substantive result. Last month, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made a personal effort to encourage progress in the Disarmament Commission. He argued, “It is not a defeat to move forward today on those issues where progress is possible, and to pursue other goals tomorrow,” adding that “there is no shame or loss of pride in acting according to the laws of reason.” His point also applies to the work of this Panel—there is nothing wrong, and much that is right, in producing a report that addresses only those specific missile concerns and control opportunities upon which all members can agree.

While missiles present difficult political and technical challenges, such difficulties have not prevented past progress in this area. One example includes the adoption of the report by the first missiles Panel. In addition, the Secretary-General submitted his own missiles report in 2006, which had been prepared with the support of qualified consultants and UNIDIR, taking into account the views expressed by Member States. That report identified a number of areas where consensus could be reached, namely, missile-specific confidence-building measures at the national, bilateral, regional and international levels and the existing agreement on the control of man-portable air defense systems.

I would like to close my brief remarks today by encouraging you, the members of this Panel, to build on the positive accomplishments of the past, and to avoid another setback based on an inability to reach a full consensus on all issues at once. The world is, unfortunately, still in the very early stages of building multilateral norms for missiles. This Panel can contribute significantly to this ongoing process and I extend to you my best wishes for the success of all your efforts. It is a cause that is well worth the extra effort.