

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 grateful for this opportunity 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); Tim Caughley, Deputy 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.

In my statement last year to the Committee on the role of intergovernmental organizations in arms control and disarmament, I described how this role has evolved over several centuries to yield the organizations that are represented on this panel today. I pointed out how there is actually not “a” role, but many diverse roles, for international organizations to play in advancing these goals, and added that ultimately the future of the world lies in the fate of international *organization* as a global process.

Despite the many variations in their day-to-day activities, all of the organizations represented on this panel today share a common purpose in advancing the goals of the United Nations Charter, especially with respect to strengthening international peace and security. This common purpose extends to the ultimate objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control—most notably for our purposes today, the goal of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It is this sense of common purpose that guides the overall relationship between these organizations and the United Nations, and that will determine the potential for the growth of this cooperation in disarmament and arms control in the years ahead.

In the world at large, however, the “current state of affairs” in these fields is at best unstable. And at worst—well, I can only recall the judgment of Father d’Escoto, the President of the General Assembly, who warned on 16 September that the world was in danger of “sinking in the morass of mad, suicidal selfishness.” Though he cautioned that we were not fatally condemned to this destiny, his words merit the close attention of all who participate in the work of this particular Committee.

Many of our Member States are confronting today a variety of crises that are aggravated—year after year—by the loss of a sense of common purpose, the rise of mutual mistrust, and the misperceived need to seek security in measures of self-help, rather than cooperative multilateral action, guided by the rule of law.

Some of these crises have been particularly hard on the NPT, and have inspired doubts about the treaty’s effectiveness in achieving its goals of disarmament, non-proliferation, and in promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy—while other criticisms persist over its discriminatory implementation, both between states parties and in relations with non-parties.

Some of these crises relate to the lack of any multilateral legal obligations in certain fields—as is the case with missiles, space weapons, and a wide range of conventional armaments, including

small arms and light weapons. This problem also extends to incomplete legal regimes—the CTBT and Pelindaba Treaty have not yet entered into force, several protocols of regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties remain unsigned, required nuclear safeguards agreements have not yet been concluded, there are still no general, legally-binding assurances for the security of non-nuclear-weapon states against the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

Additional challenges are arising that may not yet constitute an imminent “crisis” but nonetheless merit both concern and collective action. Many of these are arising from the global march of technological change—as, for example, in the realm of cyber-security, in the engineering of non-lethal chemical and biological agents for use as weapons, in the relentless qualitative improvements of both nuclear and conventional arms, and in the growing danger that terrorists will acquire the means to make and use weapons of mass destruction.

Another type of challenge, however, is often omitted from such a survey—namely, the challenge of *organization*, both domestic and international. The domestic organizational challenge appears in the compelling need for States to develop their own institutional infrastructures for implementing their own commitments, especially in the field of disarmament. There is a wide gap between such commitments and the lack of budgets, offices, laws, policies, and regulations to implement them. This is clearly an ends-versus-means type of crisis.

At the international level, each of the organizations on this panel today has faced similar constraints, whether they be lack of resources, the inability to undertake long-term planning, narrow legal mandates, or other such circumstances. Yet these organizations have much indeed upon which to build.

They have, first of all, this essential commitment to a *common purpose*, and from this, collective legitimacy. Their secretariats are staffed by dedicated professionals who share a common perception of the global challenges and the enormous potential for cooperative action in addressing them.

Second, these organizations *remain useful* to States and are almost destined to be more so in the years ahead. They provide a central repository for information and serve as a kind of “institutional memory” of the world community in their respective disarmament and non-proliferation fields. They promote the agreed objectives of states, by assisting at treaty review conferences, advocating universal membership in treaties and full compliance, building support for these agreed goals in civil society, and helping to educate and train a younger generation to assume their own responsibilities in these fields to meet future challenges. Some of these organizations provide technical assistance, some conduct inspections, some assist in the physical destruction of weapons, and some work to protect against the misuse of technology. All, however, offer distinct practical advantages over the ineffective and dangerous alternatives of self-help and unilateralism.

It is quite apparent that despite the turmoil in our world today—despite the lack of common purpose, despite the mutual mistrust, and despite the persistence of the view that security is only found in weaponry—it is in the realm of international *organization* where some of the greatest progress is possible in fulfilling both disarmament and non-proliferation goals. I believe many Member States share this view, as do many groups in civil society around the world. And I believe that the main reasons for the great contributions of international organizations in arms control and disarmament relate to this notion of common purpose, and the role of these organizations in building mutual trust and confidence among states.

Some may of course say that progress in disarmament must await an improved international environment—indeed, the prior achievement of harmonic world peace. Others strongly disagree, pointing to the many ways that disarmament promotes peace and security. In a press conference in Prague in 1956, here is how Dag Hammarskjöld addressed this issue:

Now there is, of course, a kind of shuttle traffic between the improvement in the international atmosphere and disarmament. On the one hand ... disarmament is not likely to come about in an efficient, effective way short of a further improvement in the international situation. On the other hand, I do not think any single policy move will contribute more to an improvement in the international atmosphere than an agreement on even the most modest step in the direction of disarmament.

His words remain true today. He also left us, however, with another legacy, and that is his warning of the dangers of compromising the fundamental principles and ideals of the United Nations as an organization. In one of his last reports on the work of the organization, he said:

It is my firm conviction that any result bought at the price of a compromise with the principles and ideals of the Organization, either by yielding to force, by disregard of justice, by neglect of common interests or by contempt for human rights, is bought at too high a price.

It is in this spirit—embodying a shared commitment to a common purpose, a determination not to sacrifice the principles and ideals of our respective organizations in the field of arms control and disarmament, and a willingness to learn from the experience of those who preceded us in these fields—that I wish all of the participants in this panel well in their noble work, which I believe has earned the respect and support of all our Member States.