

United Nations

Remarks by *Sergio Duarte*
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

DPI/NGO Briefing

“Disarmament: Fresh Answers, Old questions”

30 October 2008
Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium

Let me begin by thanking Maria-Luisa Chavez for organizing this first of a series of panels in preparation for the DPI/NGO Annual Conference next year on disarmament and non-proliferation issues. I also wish to welcome the other panellists, who are all well-known experts in these fields.

We are approaching a historic crossroads in addressing these issues, and have reached a pivotal moment. We need to give some careful thought as we prepare to navigate the way ahead. My job today was made a little easier by two speeches made last week by the Secretary-General, both of which are available on the web site of the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

At Harvard on 21 October, the Secretary-General identified five global public goods, which serve the interests of all States. Among these were non-proliferation and disarmament—global public goods that the UN has been promoting for over six decades.

Three days later, the Secretary-General then devoted his whole statement to nuclear issues at the consultation organized by the East West Institute, known for its track-two efforts to end the Cold War and mend the relations between Russian and the West. The purpose of that consultation was to search for breakthroughs that could lead us toward a nuclear-weapons-free world.

Noting that nuclear disarmament has long remained only an aspiration rather than an accomplished fact, the Secretary-General nevertheless saw great potential for fresh answers to old questions, as suggested in the title of our meeting today. He recalled several recent initiatives that have injected new life into the cause of disarmament, including proposals by past and present statesmen, the WMD Commission chaired by Hans Blix, the New Agenda Coalition, Norway's 7-Nation Initiative, the newly-established International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, and numerous additional proposals made by Governments as well as by independent experts and civil society organizations.

The Secretary-General then offered a five-point proposal:

First, he urged all NPT parties, in particular the nuclear-weapon-states, to fulfil their obligation under the treaty to undertake negotiations on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament. This could be done by agreeing on a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments, or by negotiating a nuclear-weapons convention, backed by a strong system of verification, as has long been proposed at the United Nations.

Second, he suggested that the Security Council's permanent members commence discussions on security issues in the nuclear disarmament process, including giving unambiguous assurances to non-nuclear-weapon states that they will not be the subject of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. He also suggested that the Council could convene a summit on nuclear disarmament, and

that non-NPT States should freeze their own nuclear-weapon capabilities and make their own disarmament commitments.

Third, the Secretary General asked for renewed efforts to strengthen the rule of law in disarmament, by bringing the CTBT into force and commencing negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on a fissile material treaty immediately, without preconditions. He also urged all NPT parties to conclude their IAEA safeguards agreements and voluntarily to adopt the strengthened safeguards under the Additional Protocol.

His fourth proposal was to invite the nuclear-weapon States to send information on their efforts in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to the UN Secretariat, for further dissemination to the public. This initiative would not only increase transparency, but would ensure greater access to such information by civil society.

Finally, the Secretary General invoked a number of complementary measures, including—the elimination of other types of WMD; new efforts against WMD terrorism; limits on the production and trade in conventional arms; and new weapons bans, including of missiles and space weapons.

As you know, we are deeply engaged in preparations for the 2010 NPT Review Conference. I have repeatedly emphasized both to Governments and in my public remarks that it is essential for the 3rd Preparatory Committee next May to adopt an agenda, which would allow the Review Conference to start off on solid ground and enter into substantive discussions.

I have used every occasion available to me to add the United Nations' voice to those of Governments and civil society in stressing how pivotal the 2010 Review Conference is to the credibility and viability of the NPT itself. In my view, both its non-proliferation and disarmament commitments must be reaffirmed.

Consistent with the UN's longstanding "ultimate goal" of general and complete disarmament, I would like to emphasize that this is also a time for new progress in the regulation of conventional weapons. We are facing today a shortage not of words, but of actions and concrete results.

In the area of small arms and light weapons, the adoption of the Outcome document of the July 2008 Third Biennial Meeting of States on the Programme of Action was a very welcome development—it kept the issue high on the agenda of the international community, as we have just seen in the current First Committee session.

I am very pleased that this issue is getting greater attention both by States and civil society, which has made important contributions. While discussions of this issue have traditionally focused on the illicit trade in such weapons—and on related subjects of export/import controls, stockpile

management, the destruction of surplus stockpiles and so on—there has been in recent years a growing international recognition of the implications of this trade for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Let me expand on this a bit. It is difficult indeed to advance these goals in a climate where armed violence is continuing to rage, fed by a seemingly endless supply of illicit weaponry. Such a climate serves to discourage new investments, erode public confidence, destroy the rule of law, and divert scarce public funds that are so desperately needed to meet development needs. While the “root causes” of such violence are almost always diverse, there is little doubt that the ready availability of such weaponry is serving to frustrate new progress in meeting compelling development goals.

This is why it is so important to address this chronic problem of armed violence, and to use all instruments available, including better legislation, enforcement, development assistance, and security sector reform. Though illicit weapons are a big part of the overall problem of armed violence, many other conventional weapons issues are also calling out for action.

The signing of the treaty on cluster munitions in December this year will constitute another “fresh answer” to an old problem, and it has the full backing of the Secretary-General, who will be its Depositary. The treaty will reduce unacceptable suffering by civilians caused by these weapons. The Secretary-General also supports the parallel process in the framework of the Conventional Weapons Convention, which, though short of a total ban, will also, once agreement is reached, reduce the impact of these weapons on civilians. Let me congratulate the NGO community for their active engagement and promotion of new norms on this particular issue.

The First Committee of the General Assembly is also discussing how to proceed on the road to an arms trade treaty. There are virtually no multilateral legal guidelines or standards for states to use in making decisions on the weapons they wish to trade. We should capitalize on the fact that the arms industry recognizes the benefits of such a treaty. The establishment of an Open-Ended Working Group on an Arms Trade Treaty will be a welcome advancement of the issue.

In conclusion, I wish to thank you for all that you have already done to promote all of the disarmament and non-proliferation goals that I have addressed today, and I count on your continued support as we travel the long road ahead toward a safer and more secure world.