

**Opening Remarks to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of  
the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters**  
Geneva, 1 July 2009

By Sergio Duarte  
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

I will begin my brief remarks today by warmly welcoming you to Geneva for the opening of this 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. I wish in particular to recognize the new member of the Board, Mr. Francois Rivasseau, who will succeed Mr. Phillippe Carré following his departure after several years of distinguished service on the Board.

It is an auspicious sign that all members are able to attend this session, though there are in fact many other favourable signs that are setting the stage for your work. I have in mind of course the adoption—at long last—of a programme of work in the Conference on Disarmament at its current session, which included an agreement to commence negotiations on a verifiable fissile material treaty.

Yet we also had a positive outcome at the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference last May, including agreement on a provisional agenda for that very important event next year.

The joint statement by Presidents Obama and Medvedev of 1 April was also a welcome development, given its clear statement of the commitment of both Presidents to reduce their nuclear arsenals. I was especially pleased to see both that they framed this commitment in the context of their mutual obligations under Article VI of the NPT, and that they affirmed that they would seek an agreement to replace the START treaty that contained effective verification measures. The negotiators will be reporting on their progress later this month.

There are also indications of some new hope for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, especially in light of the announced commitment by the Obama Administration to seek the Senate's advice and consent for its ratification. Indonesia announced last month that it will ratify the treaty after the US does. In late September, the treaty's Depositary—Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon—will open the next Article XIV Conference at the United Nations, to explore ways to facilitate the treaty's entry into force.

It is interesting that the joint statement, the CD's programme of work, and the CTBT all in one way or another involve verification issues, a key item on the Board's agenda, and an issue with a UN history that extends over six decades. Your deliberations on verification offer a timely opportunity to address some criticisms that we often hear about disarmament, especially with respect to the challenge of detecting non-compliance. The Secretary-General is very much interested in this issue, especially as it relates to possible future roles of the United Nations, and I am sure he is looking forward to hearing your views on this issue.

While the issue of verification has a long history at the UN, this Board has also tried to maintain a balance in its agenda by including some new or emerging issues, which this year includes the challenge of cyberwarfare and its impact on international security.

We have all heard the adage that “knowledge is power,” yet to a large extent it is increasingly apparent that information is itself a basis for power. This of course implies the existence of new vulnerabilities, for the more we rely upon electronic information in the work of maintaining international peace and security—not to mention the day-to-day operations of the global economy and telecommunications systems—the greater will be the risk that this all could be jeopardized by threats to the accessibility or reliability of that information. To this extent, cyberwarfare potentially affects virtually all the United Nations is trying to accomplish with respect to both of its historic mandates of disarmament and the regulation of armaments. I know this is not an easy issue for the Board to address, though I fully share your conviction that it is definitely worthy to address sooner rather than later.

Since this is your second session this year, I understand that one of your key goals will be to formulate recommendations to the Secretary-General on both of these agenda items. As has been our longstanding tradition, the Office for Disarmament Affairs will continue to do all it can to assist your work.

I understand that you will also be addressing some conceptual issues relating to the 2010 NPT Review Conference. This is certainly no time for complacency about the outcome of that Conference. While important procedural and administrative issues were successfully addressed by the Preparatory Committee, many difficult substantive issues that were raised in national statements and working papers remained unresolved.

I would therefore like to encourage you to include in your work some discussion of the treaty’s “strengthened review process.” Is a Preparatory Committee’s inability to reach a substantive consensus due to some flaw in that process, or is it instead merely an accurate reflection of differences among the States parties? If the former, what procedural reforms are needed? If the latter, how can the review process best contribute to forging such a consensus?

There are of course many other conceptual issues that remain to be addressed relating to the treaty, including the challenges ahead for achieving universality and the difficult issue of relations with non-parties, in particular with respect to cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. There are other challenges relating to treaty withdrawal, to what many call the NPT’s “institutional deficit,” and to the need to sustain and strengthen the interdependence between the three mutually-reinforcing pillars of the treaty: disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses. None of these are easy issues and I look forward to hearing your views.

I recognize that developments have not all been positive this year. We are all aware of the challenges relating to achieving compliance with the Security Council’s resolutions dealing with nuclear issues in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and in Iran. And we are also aware of the reluctance of many non-nuclear-weapon states to agree to more intrusive safeguards when similar standards of control are not applied to the nuclear-weapon states, which are modernizing their nuclear arsenals or related delivery systems.

Yet for the first time in many years, the general mood seems to have taken a favourable turn for fresh progress in disarmament. I encourage you all to build on what is positive and to identify ways to improve the world's responses to what is negative in this challenging field of disarmament.

Rest assured, your work is deeply appreciated by the Secretary-General and I believe the wider community of representatives of governments and civil society who work in this field. Please accept my best wishes for a successful session.