



Remarks to the Group of Francophone Ambassadors



By Sergio Duarte
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to speak with you today on global nuclear disarmament. The honour is entirely mine, for I have great respect for the combined experience of this group in support of disarmament goals over the years. It is of course also a pleasure for me to address this specific subject, which has been an interest of mine for over four decades, since my days as a junior member of the Brazilian delegation to the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee in Geneva.

All of us know that one of the most solemn responsibilities of the United Nations is in the realm of creating and sustaining multilateral norms. The UN Disarmament Commission serves in the very early stages of this process, by providing a forum for deliberating disarmament norms—in recent years, it has focused on two agenda items, one dealing with nuclear weapons.

The First Committee has its own deliberative functions in the consideration of specific resolutions—typically about fifty a year—dealing with the entire spectrum of disarmament issues. While neither the Disarmament Commission’s adopted “guidelines” nor the First Committee’s resolutions are legally binding, they both perform important roles in the definition, articulation, and advancement of disarmament norms.

The Conference on Disarmament remains at the apex of this process, given its special role as the world’s “single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.”

The United Nations, however, is not the only source of interesting ideas and initiatives relating to disarmament. In the last two years, for example, we have witnessed an outpouring of bold new proposals to revitalize nuclear disarmament efforts. Many of you are no doubt familiar with the opinion-editorials written in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2007 and 2008 by the former American officials George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. Japan and Australia have announced the creation of an International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. An international “Global Zero” initiative has been initiated, which will lead to a summit of prominent world personalities next January. The European Union, France, and the United Kingdom have also announced various proposals to advance nuclear disarmament, as have groups of senior former officials in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

Any complete list of these proposals would also have to include the numerous proposals being advanced by non-governmental organizations around the world, in addition to the nuclear disarmament resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, as well as countless other proposals and initiatives from the Non-Aligned Movement, regional bodies, and groups of states.

In a major speech delivered at the United Nations on 24 October 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon outlined his own five-point proposal for progress in nuclear disarmament.

He stressed the need for disarmament negotiations, whether focused on a nuclear-weapons convention or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments, with verification. He called on the permanent members of the Security Council to address disarmament—as provided in the Charter—so that this goal could be achieved securely. He emphasized the need to strengthen the “rule of law” in disarmament and to improve accountability and transparency, while expanding universal membership in disarmament and non-proliferation treaties. In addition, he identified many “complementary measures,” including several related to general and complete disarmament—a historic focus of attention at the Conference on Disarmament and its predecessor entities.

Fortunately, there is some evidence not just of disarmament words, but some early signs of movement toward disarmament deeds. The Russian Federation and the United States are currently discussing a bilateral agreement to extend certain provisions of the START-I treaty. Soon, in 2012, they will also be facing the expiration of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, which will provide the two states with an opportunity to agree on further reductions in their nuclear arsenals and their delivery systems.

The world community—notably in General Assembly resolutions and documents agreed at repeated meetings of states parties to the NPT—is expecting that these future reductions will not simply occur, but occur with verification, in a transparent manner, with irreversibility, and pursuant to binding commitments. We are also reaching the point in these reductions when other states that possess such weapons will inevitably have to be included in the global nuclear disarmament process.

On a separate track, preparations are proceeding reasonably well for the 2010 NPT Review Conference, as work continues for the third session of the Preparatory Committee for that conference, which will occur next May. The main goal of that session will be agree on a draft provisional agenda for the Review Conference, and if possible, also on some substantive recommendations. I hope that the Preparatory Committee will also be able to reach a consensus on other procedural issues, including the selection of a President for the Review Conference, and that there will be a thorough review of the treaty and the various commitments related to it.

While I am very encouraged by these various signs of progress, I only hope that we do not reach the point where absolute preconditions are prescribed before such progress—specifically in the field of disarmament—can proceed any further. I believe that progress in nuclear non-proliferation and in improving the physical security of nuclear materials must proceed simultaneously with progress in disarmament—rather than serve as any precondition for disarmament to occur. The same applies to reductions in the field of conventional arms. The logic of “general and complete disarmament”—which envisages the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and the limitation of conventional arms—remains relevant to our current needs. Clearly, nuclear disarmament must proceed hand in hand with progress in these other areas—not await their prior achievement.

So here is essentially where the world now stands with respect to nuclear weapons. There is undoubtedly a growing desire to achieve their total elimination, but there will still be some difficult political and technical obstacles to overcome in reaching that destination. We are witnessing the

continuation of a decline in the declared size of some nuclear stockpiles—though we have no means in place to effectively verify these declarations. We have seen several nuclear weapon test sites shut down, and the persistence of a de facto global moratorium on such tests, but still the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has not entered into force. We have enormous support for the start of negotiations on a fissile material treaty, but still no consensus to allow such negotiations to begin. We have heard many official statements of support for the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, yet we also see long-range plans to maintain and even improve nuclear arsenals. We see references to the need to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security policy, yet the doctrine of nuclear deterrence not only persists, but has been adopted by additional states in the post Cold War era.

Despite all the work that lies ahead, and I do not minimize the difficulties, I still remain convinced that significant progress in nuclear disarmament is not only possible, but likely in the years ahead. I know that the members of this group are facing many diverse and urgent priorities relating to the immediate needs of their respective fellow citizens. Yet I also know that you understand how the security and economic benefits from nuclear disarmament together form a solid foundation on which to build.

I very much welcome your interest in nuclear disarmament. Let us start the process of building on this foundation today.