

An Update on the Disarmament Cascade

By

Sergio Duarte

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



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I welcome this opportunity to brief this Commission on the global disarmament agenda. Before proceeding, I wish to congratulate all Commissioners and its Chairman, Hans Blix for your fine work in laying out a sensible agenda for achieving a WMD-free world. Your report, *Weapons of Terror*, will inform deliberations on disarmament policy for years to come, while helping to educate an emerging generation of leaders. And you know that your report was very warmly received at the UN.

The global disarmament agenda is determined mainly by actions of sovereign states, which set priorities, pay relevant expenses, enact implementing legislation, and as a practical matter, play the largest role in enforcement. Even the actions of the Security Council result from decisions by states. Nobody could dispute, however, that the UN plays key roles in promoting disarmament, especially by assisting in the development, promotion, and maintenance the international rule of law.

It would therefore be quite wrong to conclude that this global disarmament agenda is set *exclusively* by states, or to suggest that the decisions made by states are un-affected by the wider political climate and prevailing demands and expectations from civil society. This is where international commissions have often had their greatest impact—in framing issues, setting them into their proper context, and pointing out areas for policy and institutional reforms.

When Jayantha Dhanapala first proposed this Commission in 2002, he called for efforts to bridge the “disarmament divide.” By this he meant the gap between the high transparency and rigorous controls imposed to prevent proliferation, versus the absence of any comparable measures to advance disarmament. The perpetuation of this divide, he well understood, only served to undercut the basic fairness and legitimacy of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime based on the NPT.

The Commission took this challenge seriously, as half of its 60 recommendations dealt with nuclear weapons issues. And these recommendations will have lasting effects. It certainly helped to set the stage for the influential *Wall Street Journal* Op-Ed by George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, which appeared six months after publication of the Commission’s report.

The global disarmament agenda clearly has no one cause. It flows like a great river—always in motion, fed by numerous tributaries, with some originating in particular states or coalitions of states, some coming from initiatives proposed by diverse groups in civil society, and some coming from the UN Secretary-General—including the five-point proposal of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched on 24 October 2008, which echoes several of this Commission’s Recommendations. The current of this river is of course variable, depending on environmental trends and upstream developments, yet its sheer persistence is perhaps its most notable characteristic. Such rivers can overcome formidable obstacles—in time, they can even carve spectacular canyons out of solid rock.

Unfortunately, the many risks posed by weapons of mass destruction—especially nuclear weapons—are such that the world cannot afford to wait for disarmament to evolve over many eons of geological time. No, time is not a friendly ally in overcoming the obstacles that lie ahead, as we urgently confront threats from existing arsenals, from their proliferation to additional states, and from their possible acquisition by non-state actors. And all of these challenges must be addressed precisely as the Commission has recommended: simultaneously, not in any mechanical sequence.

Aware of these stakes, the world has produced a cascade of disarmament initiatives. We have seen several new disarmament proposals by additional “gangs” of distinguished statesmen, including in Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Poland. We have also seen the creation of a new

International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament and the launching of ambitious civil society initiatives, including Global Zero, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, the Luxembourg Forum on Preventing Nuclear Catastrophe, Pugwash Conferences, the Nuclear Security Project, and the Article VI Forum, sustained by the work of the Global Security Institute's Middle Powers Initiative.

All of the nuclear-weapon states have either affirmed their goal of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world or outlined new proposals to achieve it. Some of these states have taken steps to limit or reduce their nuclear arsenals—including: shutting down sites for producing fissile material for weapons; maintaining unilateral moratoria on nuclear tests or in some cases closing test sites; retiring certain types of weapons or their delivery vehicles; and reducing the readiness of nuclear weapons. I was pleased to see negotiations resume between the Russian Federation and the United States on a replacement for START-I and their commitment to pursue further and verifiable reductions in their nuclear arsenals. The joint statement by Presidents Medvedev and Obama last April contained a welcome acknowledgement that these reductions are being pursued in accordance with their obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

As the numbers of weapons reportedly continue to fall, I hope that we will soon be seeing progress in some other areas as well, especially to bridge a new disarmament divide—namely, the gap between proposals that are well-founded . . . but un-funded.

There is also a need to develop a legal and institutional infrastructure for disarmament in virtually all countries that possess such weapons—the lack of special agencies, laboratories, contractors, legislative committees, domestic laws, regulations, and budgets dedicated to disarmament only offers critics grounds for questioning the intention of the nuclear powers to follow through on their commitments. This point about infrastructures also applies globally, as seen in budget and staffing shortfalls in organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN secretariat. Other concerns stem from efforts that are underway to improve nuclear weapons or their delivery systems, all to maintain what is often called “minimum” nuclear deterrence.

The real challenge facing these nuclear powers is their need to begin planning for security in a nuclear-weapon-free world, precisely what the Commission advised in its 16th and 30th Recommendations. The achievement of global nuclear disarmament will also require careful consideration of issues relating to conventional weapons, a relationship inherent in the longstanding UN principle of “undiminished security” in the disarmament process. Our common aim is not just to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world, but a safer world without nuclear weapons.

In this context, I believe it is important to recall the notion of “general and complete disarmament under effective international control,” which has officially been the UN's “ultimate objective” since the General Assembly's first special session on disarmament in 1978. I believe the multilateral disarmament agenda in the years to come will indeed involve parallel and mutually reinforcing efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, while establishing new limits on the production, trade, development, and stockpiling of conventional arms, as well new constraints on the missions for which such arms may be legitimately used. These twin aims of disarmament and the regulation of armaments, I must add, are explicitly found in the UN Charter.

The disarmament agenda must also involve the revitalization of efforts within the multilateral disarmament machinery. The deliberative UN Disarmament Commission has been unable to reach

any consensus on its substantive issues for a decade now, though it has just recently been able to adopt an agenda for its current cycle of sessions. The General Assembly's First Committee remains a vast reservoir of constructive disarmament proposals, yet it remains deeply divided on resolutions dealing with nuclear-weapons issues. And we are all familiar with the chronic stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament, the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

The UN Secretariat is also a key part of this machinery, as seen in the extensive assistance provided by the Office for Disarmament Affairs in the NPT review process. Next Monday, the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference will open its third session at the UN.

Without doubt, the greatest difficulties facing these institutions relate much more to political will than to any administrative shortcomings. Fortunately, the whole spirit and tone of debates I have witnessed in various UN forums has been increasingly positive in recent months. If 2009 proves to be productive for progress in nuclear disarmament, I believe this positive spirit will not only continue but will also have spill-over effects. Such a spirit will be needed as new participants join nuclear disarmament negotiations, as indeed they must in the years ahead.

Some may at this point ask, what about the suspicious activities in countries X, Y, or Z? Should we not concentrate all our efforts on them? The answer is that we need to do both: the world needs both to address particular concerns relating to possible non-compliance with commitments relating to weapons of mass destruction, while also strengthening the health of the overall regime.

The most dangerous course to pursue would be to postpone indefinitely the achievement of disarmament, while focusing only on proliferation and terrorist threats. Our collective ability to confront such threats will be profoundly influenced by the degree to which the world community is able to agree that weapons of mass destruction belong in nobody's hands. The goal must be to delegitimize the weapons per se, not simply to prevent their possession by certain states. There is no more credible, no more convincing, and no more effective way to achieve this objective than by diligently moving forward to achieve the global elimination and prohibition of these weapons of terror.

I will now conclude by congratulating all members of this Commission once again for a job well done. You can take great pride in your report. You have left an honourable legacy indeed.