

STATEMENT TO THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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

I welcome this opportunity to address this Committee and it is my honour to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your appointment to guide its work. I also wish to recognize the distinguished members of the Bureau and to assure them of the fullest cooperation of the Office for Disarmament Affairs throughout the work of the Committee.

This may well be remembered as one of the more remarkable years in the history of disarmament efforts at the United Nations—and the year is of course not yet over.

Some of you may recall that this is the 50th anniversary of General Assembly Resolution 1378, which identified “general and complete disarmament under effective international control”—or GCD—as a basic goal of the United Nations. At its first Special Session on disarmament in 1978, the General Assembly adopted this as the “ultimate objective” of the United Nations in this field.

Since the concept of GCD combines the aims of *eliminating* nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, with the parallel goal of *regulating* conventional armaments, the opening of this particular session of the First Committee provides a fitting occasion to reflect on what has been accomplished and what remains to be achieved in these areas.

Let me recall a few of the developments that have occurred just in the nuclear-weapons field since the opening of last year’s session of the First Committee:

- Last October, the Secretary-General launched his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal, which he has been promoting in speeches and commentaries around the world.
- This year, treaties establishing regional nuclear-weapon-free zones in Central Asia and in Africa entered into force.
- In April, Presidents Medvedev and Obama issued a Joint Statement announcing their decision to pursue further reductions their strategic offensive arms in accordance with Article VI of the NPT—and three months later, they signed a Joint Understanding that outlined elements for a new legally binding agreement to replace the START treaty, to be concluded at an early date.
- In May, the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2010 NPT Review Conference ended on a positive note, without reaching agreement however on substantive recommendations to the Review Conference.
- On 25 May, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea conducted a nuclear test that was condemned “in the strongest terms” by the Security Council.
- Then on 29 May, the Conference on Disarmament finally broke a long stalemate and adopted

a programme of work for 2009, but was unfortunately not able to implement it, despite dedicated efforts by its member states.

- In September, the UN's Department of Public Information, the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Government of Mexico jointly organized a large and successful conference in Mexico City of non-governmental organizations to address disarmament issues—the event was opened by the Secretary-General, who elaborated his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal.
- On 24 September, the Security Council held its first summit that specifically addressed the issue of nuclear disarmament—while on the same day, representatives of over 100 states opened a conference to consider measures to facilitate the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- With respect to proliferation and terrorist threats from weapons of mass destruction, the Security Council Committee established by resolution 1540 has just concluded a useful open meeting that was part of its Comprehensive Review of the implementation of the resolution.
- Meanwhile, new initiatives have been launched in civil society throughout this past year to advance disarmament objectives.
- And diplomatic efforts are continuing to achieve full implementation of Security Council resolutions dealing with concerns over nuclear activities in Iran.

This brief summary illustrates the broad scope of the challenges all states are facing in the specific field of nuclear disarmament, as well as the dynamic flow of events that relate to such challenges—a history with a mixed record of genuine progress and some significant setbacks.

We should not forget, however, that much indeed has been achieved since GCD first appeared on the UN agenda. We have multilateral treaties outlawing biological and chemical weapons, which are both continuing to increase in membership. We now have five regional nuclear-weapon-free zones and new forms of cooperation between them. We have witnessed the early first steps of a long process of creating multilateral norms for missiles, though much more needs to be done to build on the work of groups of governmental experts and General Assembly resolutions on this subject. We have seen other initiatives to create new legal norms to prevent an arms race in outer space.

And we have also witnessed slow but steady efforts to establish and strengthen the rule of law with respect to conventional arms—efforts including the conclusion of conventions to prohibit cluster munitions and landmines, the pursuit of an arms trade treaty, the adoption and implementation of a Programme of Action to prevent the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and new efforts to promote universal adherence to prohibitions under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Additional efforts are also needed to improve transparency in armaments—as illustrated last year by the lowest-ever level of national reporting to the UN Register of Conventional Arms. There is also a need for greater use of the Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures.

On this larger subject of military spending, the news is not very encouraging. The latest yearbook of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that global military expenditures last year exceeded \$1.4 trillion—which represents a 4 percent real increase compared to the previous year, and an alarming 45 percent increase since 1999. Over the last

decade, this rate of growth has been in double digits in virtually all regions.

This disturbing trend only underscores the importance of expanded regional approaches to limit this high rate of growth in military spending, and I know that the three UN regional centres for peace and disarmament in Latin American and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific are doing all they can with their limited resources to assist governments and civil society in achieving such a goal, while also working to prevent the illicit trade in small arms, to assist in security sector reform, and to advance other disarmament goals.

In addition, SIPRI found that global arms production rose to a level of \$347 billion last year, and there has been a similar rising trend in international transfers of major conventional arms. The two substantive sessions this year of the Open-Ended Working Group on the arms trade treaty left little doubt that there is widespread recognition that the international conventional arms trade poses some major problems, and this awareness offers a foundation for new progress in this field in the months and years ahead.

The implications of these rising expenditures on arms were a focus of a Security Council debate in November last year, which brought into sharp focus the goal of Article 26 of the Charter—namely, to maintain international peace and security with the “least diversion for armaments of the world’s human and economic resources.” There is a growing recognition in the world that military expenditures need to be reduced and the international arms trade needs better regulation, in accordance with agreed norms.

With respect to small arms, international efforts to address this issue focused initially on the narrow issue of the illicit trade in such arms, while more recently these efforts have expanded to include the negative impact of armed violence on security, human rights and development, and the important contribution of improving security as a basis for facilitating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

An important source for further information about UN efforts to advance the goals of eliminating weapons of mass destruction while limiting conventional arms, is the *United Nations Disarmament Yearbook*. I am pleased to announce that Part II of this yearbook has just been published, which contains a detailed chronicle of deliberations, achievements and setbacks in the UN disarmament machinery for 2008. It is now available to all delegations in both printed copies and online.

This yearbook is just one of many publications of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, which have together proven to be helpful in promoting a wider public involvement in advancing disarmament issues. In recent years, civil society has generated its own disarmament initiatives, which I believe have helped to reinforce the political will needed to advance the disarmament agenda.

In introducing the GCD resolution in 1959, the Soviet Government stated that “... it is the duty of all States and of the United Nations urgently to seek a new way of solving the problem of disarmament, which is the burning problem of our time.”

With some 23,000 nuclear weapons reportedly still in existence, thousands of missiles and bombers to deliver them, weapons of mass destruction treaties that still fall short of universal membership, and a large and growing agenda for conventional arms control, it is very difficult to dispute that the problem of achieving disarmament goals remains today the burning problem of our time.

Yet with visionary leadership, political will, and strong support from civil society, the world is surely capable of solving this problem. I appeal to each delegation as the First Committee commences its 64th session to proceed in a spirit of mutual goodwill and with a shared recognition of our common interests. The Security Council's action in convening a summit to address disarmament issues could well represent a turning point in the history of the United Nations in this field—a new era highlighting the indispensable role of the United Nations in advancing multilateral cooperation in disarmament.

Let us therefore build upon the positive momentum that has been established this year. Let us reaffirm our resolve to satisfy past commitments. Let us get on with the work of fulfilling the Charter's great goal of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, by reducing and eliminating the means to wage such wars. Together, let us resume this great journey today.