

Panel of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly  
*“Current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament  
and the role of the respective organizations”*

**Statement before  
The First Committee of the General Assembly**

by  
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I am very grateful for this opportunity to participate in this panel, together with my distinguished colleagues, Ambassador Tibor Tóth, Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization, and Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament.

The indicative timetable in document CRP.1 also lists the participation of representatives from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on this panel, as is customary. Due to some schedule conflicts, however, they are unable to be with us today. I would like to note that Ambassador Rogelio Pfirter, the Director-General of the OPCW, will be addressing the Committee on Friday afternoon, 16 October.

Of course, if this panel were truly representative of all the intergovernmental, regional, and subregional organizations that work in these fields—not to mention the countless other civil society organizations working worldwide for the same goals—we would require not just a longer podium, but a larger room.

We are fortunate indeed that there has been such a growth of international interest in efforts to promote disarmament and non-proliferation objectives. These diverse organizations have proliferated more rapidly and extensively than the deadliest weapons themselves—and this institutional growth has undoubtedly contributed to much of the progress that has been made in moving the world away from such weaponry.

This development has not received the attention it deserves, for it symbolizes a profound change that is underway both in the way that international relations are conducted and, more specifically, in the growth of a widespread global recognition of how progress in disarmament and non-proliferation serves to benefit other global goals well outside the traditional realm of international peace and security.

Consider just for a moment the functional diversity of the following organizations, all of which are involved in some types of activities relating to the control or elimination of certain types of armaments or the armed violence associated with such weaponry, including terrorism. In addition to the organizations I have mentioned above, these would include—at the global level—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Police Organization (INTERPOL), the World Customs Organization, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, as well as countless other institutions in the United Nations System.

The interest of these organizations in matters dealing with weaponry and armed violence testifies to a growing appreciation throughout the world that disarmament and non-proliferation are what the Secretary-General has called “global public goods” that offer benefits to everybody. A similar awareness is growing that setbacks and failures to achieve these goals also have negative effects throughout whole societies and economies.

Working in partnership with several intergovernmental organizations—in some cases over several decades—the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and its predecessors in the UN Secretariat have long sought to promote the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, while also working to prevent their proliferation or acquisition by terrorists. These efforts include our substantive and administrative support to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva—and it also extends to our longstanding efforts to assist and promote the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization. I very much look forward to the day—which might not be far away—when we can finally drop the term “preparatory commission” from the name of this vital organization.

My Office is also deeply involved in organizing workshops and seminars to promote implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540, an effort that seeks to assist states in various regions—at their request—through capacity building, in particular with respect to preventing the illicit trade in deadly weapons-related materials and technologies. With funding from the European Union and the Governments of several States, my Office has organized workshops this year in Qatar, Vanuatu, and Costa Rica—and we are currently preparing a workshop to be held in Egypt in December. These workshops enabled officials of national and subregional organizations to have productive exchanges with representatives from intergovernmental organizations, including several traditionally represented on this panel.

UNODA is also an active participant in the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, whose current membership includes representatives from 24 organizations and offices throughout the UN system. By serving to ensure overall coordination and coherence of UN counter-terrorism efforts, this Task Force plays a vital role in implementing the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was adopted by Member States in 2006. At the heart of this Strategy is a determined effort to enhance cooperation at the global, regional, and national levels against terrorism. One recent product of this cooperation has been the development of a template of the Biological Incident Database, to complement the biocrimes database contemplated by INTERPOL.

Intergovernmental organizations at the regional and subregional levels have experienced a similar growth over the years. And as these organizations continue to grow, we have also witnessed an expansion in the numbers, geographic scope, networking, and diversity of countless additional organizations in civil society that share this common commitment to advance disarmament and non-proliferation agendas.

With respect to UNODA, our cooperation with intergovernmental organizations is by no means limited to those dealing with weapons of mass destruction. We also work, for example, with local, sub-regional and regional organizations literally on a daily basis

to promote efforts against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and to curb armed violence. Our Office is the coordinating focal point of such efforts within the larger inter-agency UN system.

Last June and July, we conducted two regional meetings on small-arms issues in close collaboration with sub-regional and regional organizations. The meeting in the Pacific region was organized with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat—while a separate meeting for States from East and Southern Africa was organized with the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, the Southern African Development Community, and the African Union. Both meetings produced substantive outcome documents that contribute to the follow-up process after last year's third Biennial Meeting of States on the implementation of the Programme of Action.

I am very pleased that last August the Peace and Security Council of the African Union devoted a meeting to the activities of the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa and issued a communiqué expressing its satisfaction with the recent efforts of the Centre to extend its operations to cover all of Africa. The Council also welcomed increased collaboration between the Centre and the African Union and the various other regional organizations.

I believe that the totality of these developments—namely, this growth and diversification of intergovernmental organizations, the burgeoning interest of civil society, and the demonstrations of enlightened leadership by leaders of national governments—all of these trends significantly improve the prospects for eventual success in achieving disarmament and non-proliferation goals. This progress helps to advance other important goals, including the reduction of armed violence and the prevention of catastrophic acts of terror.

We have all heard that the “lack of political will” is ultimately responsible for the lack of greater success in achieving disarmament goals. Yet as the world continues this process of organizational growth and cooperation, as the ties between these organizations strengthen over time, as the public becomes increasingly aware of the positive contributions of these organizations—indeed their indispensability—it follows that additional institutional resources would become available to such organizations so that they can better fulfil their mandates.

Unfortunately, all of the organizations and bodies represented on this panel today—including my own Office for Disarmament Affairs—have experienced various capacity limitations that hinder their ability to accomplish all of those mandates. Some of these limitations are budgetary, some relate to the availability of specialized personnel, and some are political in nature. As is the case in national bureaucracies, specific offices must compete for funds and resources against competing institutional interests.

The danger in such an environment is that resources will be allocated on a zero-sum basis, where funds needed to advance one global public good will simply be taken from funds needed to advance another. This danger is especially serious when it comes to efforts to eliminate the world's deadliest weapons or to control conventional arms.

Capacity building among intergovernmental organizations, however, involves much more than just money and personnel. It is also a function of the level of cooperation, coordination, and integration of effort among such organizations. In recognition of this, the Secretary-General has agreed to participate in a joint meeting with the heads of intergovernmental organizations that work on disarmament and non-proliferation issues. On a larger dimension, one might say that the greater challenge we collectively face relates less to the characteristics of specific organizations themselves, than to the progressive development of international *organization* as an ongoing process.

Our major handicap in UNODA is the gap we have been facing between rising expectations and the steady or declining state of the resources available to meet them. In such circumstances, we value all the more every opportunity to work closely with intergovernmental organizations in the nuclear field, especially with the IAEA and CTBTO, as well as with regional intergovernmental organizations in all areas of arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation. We hope to expand this cooperation in the years ahead, as the disarmament agenda moves forward.

We are actively continuing our efforts to promote the implementation of the global disarmament and non-proliferation agenda at regional, sub-regional and national levels. Among these efforts, we are exploring joint programming, and promoting exchanges of information, joint seminars and publications, assessments of lessons learned, and the expansion of other forms of cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, as well as with civil society.

Under the Charter, one the primary purposes of the United Nations is “to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations” in the attainment of their common ends. I view this as an especially important responsibility in pursuing the common ends relating to disarmament, non-proliferation, and the prevention of catastrophic terrorist acts. I sense a new resolve among all Member States not just to reaffirm these historic ends, but to redouble our collective efforts to achieve them. This is a grand, collective enterprise in which intergovernmental organizations will have their own vital roles to play.

I hope that this panel will help in clarifying just how important those contributions have been, and their limitless potential contributions to international peace and security in the years to come.