

Keynote Address

**The Partnership between the United Nations and Civil Society to
Achieve a World Free of Nuclear Weapons**

By

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Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I thank you all for coming to this event and wish in particular to express my gratitude to its organizer, Ms. Sherill Kazan, President of the World Council of Peoples for the United Nations. Ms. Kazan has been a longstanding supporter of the United Nations, and her Council's recent journal—*Centerpoint*—features several articles on nuclear disarmament, our theme tonight.

This is a welcome opportunity for me to address the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, and the partnership between the United Nations and civil society in achieving it.

These subjects are timely indeed. Less than a week from now, the Security Council will convene its historic summit on nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. This will be the Council's first summit ever that focuses on nuclear disarmament. The same day, states that have ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty will meet—also at the UN—to consider ways to facilitate the treaty's entry into force.

While nobody expects that these two events alone will herald the dawn of a nuclear-weapon-free world, it is fair to view them as important steps toward that goal. Such events provide opportunities for states to articulate their policies and for groups in civil society to advance their own goals of prohibiting both nuclear tests and nuclear weapons themselves.

We are all quite familiar with why such efforts are necessary. We know about the many dreadful consequences from making, testing, and using such weapons—as poignantly displayed in the exhibit currently hosted by Japan and Kazakhstan in the UN's visitors lobby. We know that there are three broad categories of threats posed by the very existence of nuclear weapons. There are grave dangers associated with existing nuclear arsenals—such as risks of accidents, physical security threats, and of course, any actual use, authorized or not.

Another danger concerns the risk that additional states will acquire such weapons—and when they do, this is typically rationalized with the same language used to justify current arsenals. These include claims that such weapons are essential in guaranteeing national security and are purely for defensive purposes. Thus, as the nuclear weapons have spread, so too has the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

Other dangers arise from the ongoing process of improving such weapons, what the experts have called “vertical proliferation.” Perhaps one of the best explanations of this problem was unintentionally offered by Oscar Wilde, who once said that he could resist anything—except temptation. Historically, the temptation to improve nuclear weaponry has proven hard to resist.

For many years, however, the world community has also been aware of yet another dimension of this proliferation threat—namely, the spectre of such weapons being acquired by non-state actors, along with various other threats of nuclear terrorism, including the terrorist acquisition of so-called “dirty bombs” that are intended to contaminate rather than to produce nuclear detonations. Unless this challenge is met, we might one day find ourselves confronting both vertical and horizontal proliferation by terrorists groups themselves.

Responses to such threats have relied largely upon policies of states, acting individually or collectively. Export controls and sanctions have been common techniques used to prevent or to hinder proliferation. The creation of supplier regimes has been another. At times, states have been able to forge enough common ground to negotiate legally binding obligations, such as those enshrined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), whose parties will assemble here at the United Nations next May for the treaty's 2010 Review Conference.

Yet none of these tools has proved sufficient to eliminate all of these nuclear threats.

So what more is needed? The General Assembly responded thirty-one years ago, in the following language from the Final Document of its first Special Session on disarmament:

The most effective guarantee against the danger of nuclear war and the use of nuclear weapons is nuclear disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Similar language was also adopted in the consensus Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference, and this point remains widely—if not universally—accepted in our world today.

Let me put it this way—nuclear disarmament is not some fanciful, utopian dream. While difficult to achieve, it offers far more than each of its possible alternatives as a concrete, practical means to avoid any future use of nuclear weapons. And what are these alternatives? Pledges of no-first use are welcome, but not sufficient for this purpose, since such pledges are customarily not binding—they are also cast in ambiguous or conditional language, and implicitly rationalize the second use of such weapons, even against cities. Nuclear deterrence is also not enough to prevent use, as there are countless ways that such deterrence can break down—a danger that is only compounded by the expanding number of states that possess such weapons. The old “balance of power” hardly offers any permanent security against the use of such weapons. Nor do various protective measures like missile defence.

I find it ironic that when it comes to impracticality and utopianism, these terms appear far more applicable to the alternatives to nuclear disarmament, than to nuclear disarmament itself.

No doubt, a world without nuclear weapons will have its own security challenges to meet, a point recognized very early in the history of the United Nations. The Charter itself—which was concluded before the world's first nuclear test—contains language both on disarmament and on the regulation of armaments. In its first resolution, the General Assembly clarified back in 1946 that its goals included the total elimination of all weapons “adaptable to mass destruction.” Later resolutions would also establish goals for the regulation of conventional armaments. In 1959, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that combined these two goals into “general and complete disarmament under effective international control,” which the General Assembly adopted as the “ultimate objective” at its first Special Session on disarmament in 1978.

Judging from this history, nobody could possibly conclude that the United Nations was somehow pursuing a quixotic crusade for some impractical, utopian goal. To the contrary, the twin goals of eliminating weapons of mass destruction, while limiting the production, trade, and use of conventional arms, are together the best—if not the only—way to ensure security in a

world without nuclear weapons. Imagine just for a moment a world with no nuclear weapons, but unlimited production, trade, refinement, and use of conventional arms. Advocates of nuclear disarmament understand this danger and have always recognized that conventional arms will need to be controlled and reduced as nuclear disarmament proceeds. I view this as further confirmation of the realism that underlies serious thinking about disarmament.

Nobody expects nuclear disarmament to occur overnight, nor can it be seriously pursued without safeguards and effective verification mechanisms. Yet because of these parallel efforts to regulate and reduce conventional arms, nuclear disarmament will not in any way serve to bring conventional wars back into fashion or to foster regional arms races. This is precisely why controls over such weapons must be pursued simultaneously, as long envisioned at the United Nations. In other words, the UN had it right from the start.

Now, I realize that some have argued that we need to postpone significant progress in nuclear disarmament until other problems have been solved first. Some say, let's first insist upon the solution to the problem of war, or the achievement of world peace or world government. Others add, let's first reduce to zero the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation and nuclear terrorism, then we can take up the challenge of nuclear disarmament. And still others say that real progress in nuclear disarmament will be impossible as long as nuclear weapons continue to exist—a self-fulfilling prophecy, if ever there was one.

I believe that such prescriptions will have the effect of jeopardizing not only the achievement of nuclear disarmament, but also the other important goals of non-proliferation and preventing nuclear terrorism. The preservation of nuclear arsenals means the preservation of nuclear threats—threats of use, sabotage, and proliferation, as well as other dangers to human health and the environment. Disarmament aims not just to achieve the specific goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, but also their related dangers.

By halting the production of fissile material for weapons and safely disposing of warhead materials, for example, the world will be making it more and more difficult to make such weapons, a goal that would be substantially reinforced by enhanced controls or—better yet—prohibitions on fissile materials that are weapon-usable.

By prohibiting all nuclear tests, the CTBT would establish an effective technological barrier against the development of new types of nuclear weapons, while helping to prevent the creation of miniaturized warheads suitable for delivery on missiles.

By agreeing to the Secretary-General's proposal last October to pursue a nuclear-weapons convention—or a framework of mutually reinforcing instruments—the world would be taking a giant step forward in making the very existence of such weapons into a global taboo. This would also strengthen the credibility and effectiveness of non-proliferation efforts, a field that has long been plagued by concerns about the discriminatory treatment of have- and have-not states.

When disarmament is achieved—there would be no nuclear weapons to use, no delivery systems suitable for delivering them, and likely no fissile material directly usable in making

nuclear explosives. With the fear of possible nuclear attack effectively eliminated, mutual trust between states will grow and new opportunities will arise for peaceful cooperation. This is the type of world envisioned in the purposes and principles of Article I of the UN Charter—a world we definitely want to pursue, and a world that progress in disarmament can help us to achieve.

One of the reasons I am cautiously optimistic about the prospects for future progress in nuclear disarmament is undoubtedly because of the support this goal currently has among virtually all UN Member States, including those that possess such weapons. Another reason, just as important, is the longstanding and growing support for this goal in civil society.

The partnership between the UN and civil society, of course, has a long history that I cannot summarize in my brief remarks this evening. There is a recent event I would like to mention, though, that illustrates how this partnership is working, and where it may be heading.

In Mexico City last week, I attended the annual conference for non-governmental organizations organized by the UN's Department of Public Information, along with the Government of Mexico and my Office for Disarmament Affairs. Its theme was, "For Peace and Development: Disarm Now!" This was a memorable event, with the participation of over 1,300 NGO representatives from over 55 countries. The agenda was quite broad, as were the interests of the specific groups. In the end, though, the conference ended on a note of unity and solidarity.

The groups that had worked exclusively on disarmament issues came away understanding better how important their work was in serving a wide range of additional goals—including peace, development, human rights, and protecting the environment. Meanwhile, the groups that had never thought much about disarmament came to appreciate better how the success of disarmament efforts would help their own specific causes—and indeed, how the failure of such efforts would jeopardize much of what such groups seek to accomplish.

In short, there was general agreement—reflected in a common Declaration—that all share a common interest in moving the disarmament agenda forward.

This, I hope, will help in generating a global chain reaction of efforts in support of disarmament—efforts to inform citizens, inspire governments, and expand the networks of communication and cooperation between them all. If anyone thinks that such networking cannot really pay off, they should remember the important role played by scientists, environmentalists, and women in campaigning for a ban on atmospheric nuclear tests in the 1960s. A similar movement, spearheaded by Ms. Jody Williams and her NGO network with strong support from key governments, led to a multilateral treaty banning anti-personnel landmines.

In her Nobel Peace Lecture of 1997, here is what Ms. Williams had to say:

It was the NGOs, the non-governmental organizations, who began to seriously think about trying to deal with the root of the problem -- to eliminate the problem, it would be necessary to eliminate the weapon.

She concluded saying, “Together, we have changed history.” This can happen even in nuclear disarmament. I know that the partnership between the UN, civil society, and concerned member states will help to keep nuclear disarmament high on the international agenda, and that this partnership also facilitate its eventual achievement. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has long been working with civil society for just this reason and will continue to do so. We are proud of our efforts to promote disarmament and non-proliferation education, to produce quality publications that will both enlighten and inspire the public, and to facilitate activities of non-governmental organizations at the UN, including their interactions with member states.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated at the recent DPI/NGO conference in Mexico City, “People are the ultimate sovereigns.” Not coincidentally, they are also mentioned in the first words of the UN Charter. I sincerely believe that they will play an absolutely crucial role in shaping the future of disarmament—and as a result—international peace and security overall.

May this partnership between the United Nations and civil society continue to grow over the years ahead, and may the entire world soon reap its bounteous rewards.