

Opening Statement

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On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disarmament and the High Representative for Disarmament, Mr. Sergio Duarte, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all participants to this ninth UN/Republic of Korea Joint Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues.

I am grateful to the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for their generous cooperation in organizing the conference. The participation today of Ambassador Cho Hyun, the Deputy Minister for Multilateral and Global Affairs, suggests the importance of the issues we will be addressing.

I also wish to thank the Jeju Prefecture for hosting this conference—your beautiful island and hospitality will remain in the memories of all participants after our departure.

The conferences organized jointly by the Republic of Korea and the United Nations constitute the “Jeju Process”, which was started nine years ago by the former UN Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Republic of Korea. It has served well as a forum for engaging in an exchange of views on pressing challenges in disarmament and non-proliferation, and for exploring practical solutions.

The Republic of Korea has certainly played an important role in the international arena, on a wide range of political, security, economic, and social issues. The recent G20 summit in Seoul and the Government’s initiative to host the next Nuclear Security Summit in 2012 are excellent examples of such contributions in the common interest.

Today, in Jeju, we will focus on the global expansion of nuclear energy, in its wider security context.

The growing interest in nuclear energy is largely a product of global energy demands and concerns over energy security and climate change—conditions that have led many to predict the advent of a “Nuclear Renaissance”. Nuclear-related technologies also have important applications in fields such as human health, food and agriculture, environment and water resources. Safe and efficient use of nuclear energy could help to advance the well-being of States and their peoples, to achieve key UN Millennium Development Goals, and to benefit the environment.

Recognizing such interests, some experts predict that global nuclear energy capacity could double or triple by 2050, though this would involve the introduction of new types of reactors and sensitive nuclear technologies in various parts of the world.

Yet any serious examination of the challenge of promoting the peaceful uses of nuclear energy must also consider some closely related issues, such as enhancing nuclear safety and security, preventing nuclear terrorism, and the advancing of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament goals.

Concern with these wider issues is why the peaceful uses of nuclear energy are only one of the three pillars of the NPT. Together with disarmament and non-proliferation, these pillars constitute the “grand bargain” of the Treaty. There is a synergy between these goals, which demands that they be pursued simultaneously because they are mutually reinforcing. This is why we must address nuclear energy in its wider security contexts, as suggested by the title of this Conference.

Fortunately, many efforts have been underway in the world to address these challenges, especially with respect to nuclear safety, security and proliferation. These efforts have established a foundation for cooperation both for establishing a robust international safety and security regime, as well as for strengthening nuclear safeguards.

There are, of course, daunting challenges ahead that will require political leadership, financial investment and closely coordinated multilateral activities.

At the Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington, D.C. last April, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggested five areas where global action is required: preventing nuclear terrorism; securing nuclear fissile materials; strengthening the International Atomic Energy Agency; increasing the engagement of the Security Council; and achieving progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Each of these subjects could well provide material for a separate conference of its own, as each involves issues of great complexity. While the IAEA will continue to assist States to ensure that nuclear activities are conducted in a safe, secure and peaceful manner, the world will be facing new challenges in minimizing proliferation risks from sensitive nuclear technologies. Some of these risks might be reduced through proliferation-resistant technology, which many believe is an essential objective in the design and operation of nuclear facilities. The nuclear industry has its own contributions to make in minimizing these proliferation risks. There is also the need for further discussions on the nuclear fuel cycle, including an international fuel bank or possible regional initiatives.

Yet proliferation is hardly the only security challenge ahead. The final communiqué issued at the Washington Nuclear Security Summit also underlined the gravity of the threat of nuclear terrorism. The UN Security Council 1540 Committee, IAEA, and the UN Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate are working with Member States to address such challenges.

Important practical measures must be put in place to enhance the physical security of nuclear materials and nuclear facilities in order to reduce to an absolute minimum the risk of nuclear terrorism. It is especially appropriate for this Conference

to address this topic given that the next Nuclear Security Summit will be hosted by the Republic of Korea.

In light of all the complexities of the issues we will be addressing at this conference, I hope all participants will keep in mind that our common goals, as reflected most clearly in the NPT grand bargain, extend beyond the realm of non-proliferation and peaceful uses. The world is also working to achieve global nuclear disarmament. This has been a top priority of the United Nations for over six decades and it remains one of the most ardent aspirations of human beings throughout the world. This conference provides an opportunity to discuss issues related to the way forward to advance nuclear disarmament, as we also consider how to strengthen the other two NPT pillars of non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of entry into force of the NPT, and I am very encouraged by some recent positive developments, including: the Security Council's first Summit on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues in 2009, and several other developments this year, which include the conclusion of the New START Treaty in April, a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference in May, and a high-level meeting convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in September on the work on the Conference on Disarmament. It is especially noteworthy that the NPT Review Conference was able to agree this year on 64 specific Actions for strengthening each pillar of the treaty, while also launching a new initiative to revitalize efforts to establish a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

Yet great challenges obviously remain. While disarmament is coming back on top of the global agenda, this is certainly not a time for complacency. The Conference on Disarmament was once again unable to start negotiations on a fissile material treaty or to address the other important issues on its agenda—and it was this longstanding stalemate that led to the convening of the recent high-level meeting on the CD. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has still not entered into force. Protocols to key regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties remain un-ratified. And over 20,000 nuclear weapons reportedly continue to exist. Together, we must work to build on what is positive, sustain the momentum for disarmament, and persist in our efforts to achieve concrete results.

In closing, I would like to say a few words about the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific (UNRCPD). Since its relocation to Nepal, the Centre has strengthened its capacity to undertake regional activities related to disarmament, taking into account specific situations and practical needs of States in the region. It also continues to promote regional dialogue and confidence building on disarmament, non-proliferation and security matters through various activities, including this annual Conference.

On behalf of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, I would like to thank all countries, in particular those from the Asia/Pacific Region, for their financial and in-kind support and assistance to the Regional Centre, whose programmes rely entirely on voluntary contributions. These financial and in-kind contributions to the Centre enable it to carry out its mandate effectively, and enhance its ability to serve the interests of all States in this enormous—and enormously important—region. This is indeed a worthy investment in our common future.

With these remarks, I would now like to wish you all a very productive conference.