

Remarks at Book Launching of *Security Without Nuclear Deterrence**

By

Sergio Duarte

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



Remarks at Book Launching of *Security Without Nuclear Deterrence*
United Nations Bookshop
United Nations, 5 May 2010

* Available at www.amazon.com.

Welcome to the United Nations and its great little bookshop, a place to find some of the best publications in the world about key issues on the multilateral agenda today. And the book we are launching here today is no exception.

One of the most important of these issues is what Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called the “contagious” doctrine of nuclear deterrence. His choice of words was appropriate, for today some nine countries either have or are widely believed to possess nuclear-weapons—and each in its own way has also adopted a doctrine to describe the purposes of such weapons and the circumstances in which they might be used.

This is the doctrine of deterrence—which in essence amounts to the schoolyard argument, “if you strike me, I’ll hit you back harder.” In strategic terms, this doctrine seeks to prevent a nuclear attack through the threat of retaliation so severe as to negate any advantage in striking first. Robert J. Oppenheimer once described this situation as—in his words—“like two scorpions in a bottle, each capable of killing the other, but only at the risk of his own life”.

Many historians and defence commentators assert that nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union served to “keep the peace” throughout the Cold War era.

There are of course many problems with this claim. It cannot be proven that the non-occurrence of nuclear war was due to deterrence. Senior nuclear policy makers have, late in life, admitted to some very close calls—at a conference many years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, Robert McNamara once said “We’re damn lucky to be here.” Countless accidents involving nuclear weapons have occurred over several decades. Today, there are also not two but nine scorpions in that bottle. And there have been numerous false alarms. Despite these risks, the doctrine of deterrence has spread in this world along with nuclear weapons. Is it our common destiny that international peace and security must be based on little more than luck?

This book by former British naval Commander Robert Green clearly breaks new ground. It does not simply describe the many fallacies and risks associated with the deterrence doctrine. He offers a constructive vision of a world able to achieve, as the book’s title indicates, *Security without Nuclear Deterrence*. Commander Green is no mere armchair theorist: he worked on military aircraft that were equipped to deploy nuclear weapons, and speaks with considerable authority on the practical realities and horrific dangers associated with maintaining nuclear deterrence and, heaven forbid, confronting the consequences should it fail.

This book argues persuasively that security can indeed be maintained in a world without nuclear weapons. It makes a solid case that nuclear deterrence is “impractical, politically unsound and counterproductive to our real security needs, as well as immoral and illegal.”

Commander Green is pointing the world in the direction it simply must pursue—toward security in a nuclear-weapon-free world. This has been a theme stressed in several recent speeches by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It is a theme that is featured in the reports of International Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission and the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. And it is a theme that one can find in countless General Assembly resolutions and UN studies and reports over several decades.

I'd like to conclude by returning to Robert J. Oppenheimer. In 1948, when it became clear that early post-war efforts for the international control of atomic energy had failed, he wrote that even in failure, these efforts testified to the health of our civilization. He said, "This is seed we take with us, travelling to a land we cannot see, to plant in a new soil."

Well today, we live together in a world quite unlike that which existed in 1948. The seed of disarmament has been planted in a new soil, and is growing rapidly. I wish to commend this book by Commander Green to all who wish to tend to this particular garden, and hope that it will inspire many other former military personnel who have worked on or with nuclear weapons to contribute to meeting one of the greatest challenges of our time: achieving security in a world free of nuclear weapons.