

STATEMENT TO THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I welcome this opportunity to address the Committee and wish at the outset to welcome those members of delegations who are joining us for the first time. It is also my honour to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your appointment to guide our work. I wish to recognize as well 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.

Many of us are familiar with the word, “momentum.” It is a term that has increasingly been heard in reference to disarmament, including at the recent High-level Meeting on "Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations". The dictionary defines it as “The quantity of motion in a moving body, now expressed as the product of its mass and its velocity”. Yet our work here relates not to physical but to diplomatic momentum—we are less interested in motion itself, than in the direction of our collective efforts, and in demonstrable results.

There is clearly some new momentum with many of the issues before this Committee, including nuclear disarmament. The Presidents of the States with the largest nuclear arsenals have repeatedly endorsed this goal—and last April, the Russian Federation and the United States signed the new START treaty. China, France, and the United Kingdom have announced their own initiatives to limit their nuclear weapons capabilities. While challenges remain, we have seen efforts to improve the transparency of some nuclear arsenals, to bring the CTBT into force, and to begin negotiations on a fissile material treaty. Last September, the Security Council held its first summit on nuclear disarmament. The Nuclear Security Summit in Washington last April stressed the need for multilateral cooperation to address certain nuclear threats. In May, the NPT Review Conference produced a consensus Final Document that included 64 recommendations for action and additional agreed actions to implement the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East.

Other recent developments include the General Assembly’s debate on disarmament and non-proliferation last April, the Secretary-General’s historic visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki last August, and the recent high-level meetings on the CTBT and the Conference on Disarmament, which are widely expected will lead to further action.

This momentum is apparent in several other arenas. On 24 October 2008, the Secretary-General announced his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal, which has since been endorsed by the 4,000-member Mayors for Peace campaign, by the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, by the 3rd World Congress of the speakers of the world’s parliaments, and by many delegations in statements in the General Assembly and during the NPT review process.

Efforts from civil society have added to this momentum. Following an opinion-editorial by four senior statesmen in the United States in 2007, similar commentaries by distinguished authorities have appeared in over a dozen additional countries. Impressive campaigns have been launched in civil society to advance nuclear disarmament—impressive both in their global scope and their firm resolve. The launching last December of the final report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament was another significant development.

It is also welcome to see that the global norms against other types of weapons of mass destruction are holding up well, noting here the large membership of the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions, and the long record of compliance with those commitments. The challenge now is to build some momentum for universal membership in both Conventions.

I also see evidence of new momentum in initiatives to strengthen the rule of law with respect to the regulation of conventional armaments. Determined efforts are underway to establish and maintain some basic norms against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and to strengthen controls on stockpiles of ammunition—the 2001 Programme of Action and the four Biennial Meetings of States have underscored this commitment to action. Legal prohibitions have been agreed in recent years concerning a variety of other “inhumane weapons”, landmines, and cluster munitions. On 1 August, the world welcomed the entry into force of the Convention on Cluster Munitions and I would like to remind all delegations that the First Committee will host a special event on this Convention on 19 October—the first meeting of its States Parties will be held on 9-12 November. In addition, the General Assembly decided last December to convene a United Nations conference in 2012 on the Arms Trade Treaty, with the specific goal of elaborating a legally binding instrument on the highest possible common international standards for the transfer of conventional arms.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs is continuing its efforts to improve transparency in these areas, in particular by maintaining the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and by promoting use of the Standardized Instrument for reporting military expenditures. Greater use of these instruments by Member States would be most welcome in the years ahead, especially given the vast sums that are being allocated for military purposes, and the huge commitments for future military transfers that are being made. Quite frankly, I would like to see some greater momentum when it comes to the global use of these important transparency instruments.

While much of the work of this Committee focuses on global multilateral issues, it is also true that momentum in disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation can occur at the regional level as well. Last year, treaties establishing regional nuclear-weapon-free zones in Central Asia and Africa entered into force—these developments were welcomed by the entire world. The 2010 NPT Review Conference established a mandate to convene a conference in 2012 on the issue of establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East—an important new initiative to implement the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East.

For their part, the three UN regional centres for peace and disarmament in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, are all continuing their efforts to work with States, intergovernmental organizations as well as non-governmental groups in their respective regions. This work seeks to promote cooperation in such areas as curbing the illicit trade in small arms

and light weapons, advancing security sector reform, and more generally, in strengthening a foundation of mutual trust and respect that is indispensable for future progress in both disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation. For specific details about these activities, I encourage all delegations to consult the web site of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, where links to these regional centres can be conveniently found. I would like to add that ODA is also continuing its efforts to assist in the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540, by organizing regional workshops on this issue—much of this work is now focused on capacity-building in Member States and we are very grateful for the support we have received for these activities.

While my review of recent developments is necessarily incomplete, it does highlight certain factors that will be indispensable in sustaining or increasing the momentum for progress in disarmament over the years ahead. The first will be determined leadership from States with the largest investments in weaponry—leadership in further reducing their arsenals, limiting their arms exports, and cutting back military spending. The second will be the equally determined pursuit of disarmament and non-proliferation goals by the rest of the diplomatic community, especially the middle-power states. And the third will be the persistent efforts by individuals and groups in civil society to advance multilateral disarmament goals. The greatest momentum will be achieved through a combination of all three factors working for common ends.

In this light, the ability of the Office for Disarmament Affairs to assist Member States in advancing their agreed disarmament objectives is itself a function of the level of momentum that exists in the various fields I have identified today. Our potential contributions are greatest when momentum is increasing, yet the reverse is also true—if major steps forward in disarmament are postponed indefinitely, if questions persist of compliance with non-proliferation commitments, and if military spending continues to rise while Millennium Development Goals continue to be un-met, then our potential contributions will be correspondingly limited.

I very much welcome any ideas or advice from delegations on how the Office for Disarmament Affairs can increase its assistance to Member States in meeting their desired goals, and look forward to making our own contributions to this wider momentum of progress in disarmament, which the world so urgently needs and has the capability of achieving.

Before concluding, I would like to return briefly to the realm of physics—and specifically to Newton's third law of motion, which holds that whenever a body exerts a force on a second body, the second body exerts an equal and opposite force in return. This is often called the "action-reaction law," one that is quite familiar to advocates of disarmament. Yet the practice of diplomacy was never intended to conform to the laws of physics—and as the momentum for disarmament increases, so too will it become increasingly difficult for its opposing forces to preserve a status quo. At some point, this force simply becomes irresistible. For this reason, let me say to the distinguished members of this Committee, "may the momentum be with us."

Please accept my best wishes to all delegations as you proceed with your important work. This is your own opportunity to contribute to the momentum for progress in disarmament and I am confident this Committee can fulfill this solemn responsibility.