

Statement before the Disarmament Commission

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I am honoured to address the Disarmament Commission as it opens its 2011 substantive session and wish to commend its departing Chairman, Ambassador Jean-Francis Zinsou, for his competent stewardship of the work of this Commission last year, and to recognize with appreciation the many efforts of his Bureau. I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Hamid Al Bayati for his recent election as the new Chairman. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to assist the Chairman, the Bureau, and all delegations throughout this session.

The Commission is commencing its substantive work today in an international environment that is evolving before our eyes. Many developments open possibilities for new progress in addressing challenges the world community has long faced from weapons of mass destruction and from conventional arms. Yet many other developments raise concerns that multilateral efforts to meet these challenges will give way to other alternatives. At best, these could include limited gestures by like-minded States to plant the seeds of future multilateral norms. At worst, they could lead to the desperate pursuit of security through armed self-help.

The institutions of the UN disarmament machinery—including this Commission as its deliberative body—are intended to be useful to Member States in achieving their common goals. Yet the ultimate responsibility for the fate of disarmament initiatives lies at the doorsteps of our Member States, whose policies, priorities, and sheer persistence will shape the contours of our world to come, for better or worse. And these will in turn be influenced by the actions and expectations of civil society—that mass of humanity recognized in the Preamble of the Charter as the “peoples of the United Nations.”

This session is especially important given that the Commission is now approaching the end of its three-year cycle. Despite frustrations of the past, hopes still remain for achieving a consensus on each agenda item—recommendations for achieving nuclear disarmament and non-

proliferation; elements of a draft declaration of the 2010s as the fourth disarmament decade; and practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms.

We are all aware that this Commission has not been able to reach a consensus on substantive issues for over a decade, and such difficulties—together with those shared by other parts of the disarmament machinery—led on 24 September 2010 to the High Level Meeting on revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. In his capacity as the Chairperson of that meeting, the Secretary-General will next year submit his report and observations to the first session of the Preparatory Commission for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. It is my hope, and I am sure the hope of many delegations here today, that that report will be able to state that the Disarmament Commission was able to reach a consensus this year on the important issues on its agenda. The fate of that report and the work of this Commission remain, of course, in your hands alone.

In closing, I would like to underscore the relevance of the Commission's current agenda to the longstanding goals of the United Nations concerning weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms. While disarmament and the regulation of armaments are mentioned in the Charter, the UN has had to adapt to changing circumstances, which it has accomplished through its various administrative reforms, the adoption of General Assembly Resolutions, the negotiations of treaties in the Conference on Disarmament, and the adoption of principles, guidelines, or recommendations by the Disarmament Commission. Each of the issues on the Commission's agenda today constitutes part of a larger ambition, that of "general and complete disarmament under effective international control", which—since the General Assembly's first Special Session on disarmament—remains the UN's "ultimate objective" in this entire field.

It is an impressive reaffirmation of the wisdom of the UN Charter that even in 1945, before the first test of a nuclear weapon, the world understood the need to pursue simultaneously disarmament and arms control goals. The Commission's agenda reflects that understanding. I therefore hope this will inspire new efforts to achieve a consensus in the weeks ahead. Together, we have a solemn legacy to maintain, and a new future to create, for generations yet to come.