

Panel of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly
*“Current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament
and the role of the respective organizations”*

**Statement before
The First Committee of the General Assembly**

By

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Conference Room 1, North Lawn Building
United Nations Headquarters
12 October 2011

I am very grateful for this opportunity to participate in this panel, together with my distinguished colleagues, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Mr. Jarmo Sareva, Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, and Mr. Geoffrey Shaw, Representative of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency to the United Nations.

Each of the distinguished members of this panel is uniquely prepared to address this Committee on the broad theme of this panel—namely, the *“Current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament and the role of the respective organizations.”*

Many of us here today have heard the adage, “where you stand depends on where you sit”—and it should shock no one that there might be some variations in perspectives here on arms control and disarmament issues, given the different vantage points of the diverse organizations represented on this panel.

Yet most noteworthy of all is the extent of agreement that exists amongst us all. We certainly share a deep common commitment to the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction—our common cause is not simply in regulating such weapons, or limiting the risk or frequency of their use, but in abolishing and eliminating them safely and securely. And we all recognize the need to achieve these goals through a multilateral process.

Because we all sit in organizations that are working to assist their Member States to achieve their agreed disarmament and non-proliferation goals, it might be better to focus less on where we work geographically, than on the fact that we are all part of a common process of international *organization* aimed at freeing humanity from the insecurities and horrors from the use—or threat of use—of the world’s most deadly and indiscriminate weapons. We are more likely to achieve this goal through this larger collective process of international organization, than we are through the exclusive actions of any one of our organizations, however important they may be.

To this extent, the views we express on this panel represent something far more profound than reflections of the interests of our respective institutions. We are here instead to share our perspectives on the various processes underway in the world community to achieve a higher dimension of international peace and security, one that is rooted in mutual assistance and cooperation, rather than threats of mutual annihilation, the exhaustion of scarce public resources, and the destruction of our common natural environment and the lives and livelihoods of future generations.

From this perspective, I believe I can say that the “state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament” is showing some signs of gradual improvement, though it remains difficult to make confident predictions of the sustainability of this progress in the years ahead. Support for the key multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation treaties—in particular the NPT, CWC, and BWC—remains quite strong, as is international support for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, while the capabilities of the treaty’s verification regime continue to grow.

The strengths of these treaties are seen in the global support for the fundamental norms they represent, in their gradual but persistent evolution toward full universal membership, and in the dedicated work of the professionals who work in the organizations associated with those treaties—or, in the case of the BWC, in the extent that the global taboo on biological weapons has been accepted and integrated into domestic laws and policies.

To some extent, Security Council Resolution 1540 has helped to strengthen domestic infrastructures in achieving the twin common causes of preventing the proliferation or terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. A similar process, however, has yet to develop in ensuring that norms in the field of disarmament are reflected in mandates of specific agencies, domestic laws, military plans and doctrines, regulations, and policies.

I believe civil society and enlightened leadership from national leaders will eventually succeed in giving such norms the solid domestic foundation it will need not just to achieve the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, but to ensure that they will not re-appear. That foundation, in short, is needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of global WMD disarmament.

Of course, our focus today is not just on WMD, but also on the broad subject of “arms control”, a goal that the United Nations Charter called the “regulation of armaments.” After 65 years, there has not been much progress in the field of regulating conventional arms. We have the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, we have made some progress in developing global norms against the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, many of our Member States have joined treaties to outlaw antipersonnel landmines and cluster munitions, and next year the UN will host a major international conference to negotiate an arms trade treaty.

It is essential that these efforts not only succeed, but that further efforts are undertaken to reduce military spending, limit the production, trade, and improvement of conventional arms. The achievement of WMD disarmament must never be viewed as an invitation to the proliferation of conventional wars. The fact that there is no representative of an international agency focused on limiting the production or proliferation of conventional arms is quite telling, as we consider the views of this panel.

I say this in recognition also of the history of well-intentioned but futile efforts to control such arms in our predecessor institution, the League of Nations. Perhaps now the world is finally starting to move these collective efforts to higher plane—perhaps the evolution of the rule of law will soon be catching up with the growth in conventional weapons capabilities. If so, enlightened national leadership coupled with persistent energetic efforts from civil society will no doubt share much of the credit, just as I hope will be the case with respect to WMD disarmament.

But these are not the only actors who will contribute to this larger process of advancing the global disarmament agenda. The activities of each of the organizations represented at this panel today will also make their own important contributions, as will countless regional and sub-regional

organizations worldwide who are working on behalf of disarmament goals that serve the common good.

I am sure each of the distinguished speakers here today will describe in somewhat more detail what they are doing to fulfil their important mandates, and that delegations will also contribute their views on their activities. One area that merits some specific attention, however, relates to the productive cooperation that is going on between our various organizations.

There are many good examples of this. Personnel from the IAEA and OPCW have actively participated in joint workshops and seminars organized by UNODA to promote the implementation of Security Council resolution 1540. Last month, the UN hosted a High-level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security, which focused on the results of a system-wide UN study of the tragic accident at Fukushima, undertaken in close cooperation with the IAEA, and with the participation of 16 UN agencies. This collective effort shows that while diverse international organizations have their own mandates, they can work together in bringing their individual skills and resources to address common international challenges. I am sure my colleagues on this panel today will have additional details on this history of productive cooperation.

The world community's resolve to pursue disarmament goals is unshakable, though it is continually subject to new challenges. One of the most stubborn has been the widely-recognized need to overcome the negotiating stalemate at the CD. In this respect, both the high-level meeting convened by the Secretary-General on 24 September last year on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations—and the General Assembly's plenary follow-up meeting last July—represented much more than simply occasions to criticize the status quo, but were also opportunities for the world community to voice its support for new progress in this field—progress, in bringing the rule of law to disarmament.

As we look ahead to cooperation to come, I can find no better counsel than that provided by our Secretary-General, who stated in his address to the General Assembly's plenary follow-up meeting last July on the High-level Meeting on the CD, "What is needed most of all is a closer alignment between policy priorities and multilateral disarmament goals" – he then added,

The road ahead will not be easy. Yet we must never abandon multilateralism or our respect for universal norms. We must remain true to the ideals of the United Nations. In addressing disarmament, as with other global public goods, our goal is not to advance the preferences of the few, but the common interests of all.