



DDA 2000 Update

UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT FOR DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS

March 2000

Secretary-General's Millennium Assembly Report

“The death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as ‘weapons of mass destruction’”, stated the Secretary-General in his much-anticipated report to the Millennium Assembly issued on 27 March. With these words, the Secretary-General left no doubt about the gravity of the issue of the excessive proliferation of small arms today. Awareness of the issue is growing. The soldier swinging a rifle and the civilian being deliberately targeted are all too familiar images of the horror of contemporary conflict. The need for global and urgent action is being felt.

“From the Balkans to East Asia and to Africa, small arms have become the instrument of choice for the killers of our time. We must do our part to deny them the means for murder,” the Secretary-General told an unprecedented meeting of the Security Council on the subject of small arms in September 1999. The Security Council itself noted

SMALL ARMS

PrepCom for the International Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects



Sculpting weapons into art by G. Mabunda, of ARTARMAS in Maputo, Mozambique

that the “easy availability of small arms can be a contributing factor to undermining peace agreements, complicating peace-building efforts and impeding political, economic and social development.”

In his Millennium Report, entitled “*We the Peoples: the role of the United Nations in the Twenty-First Century*”, the Secretary-General stressed that controlling the proliferation of illicit weapons was a necessary first step towards the non-proliferation of small arms. He urged Member States to “take advantage of [the 2001 International Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects] to start taking serious actions that will curtail the illicit traffic in small arms.” See Millennium Assembly website at <http://www.un.org>. ♦ UNDDA

By resolution 54/54 V of 1 December 1999, the General Assembly decided to convene an International Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects in June/July 2001. It also established the preparatory committee for the conference. The first session of the Preparatory Committee met from 28 February to 3 March 2000 in New York. Delegations outlined their Government’s positions in the general debate and presented views on how to proceed with the Conference in a series of documents. The Preparatory Committee decided to continue its examination of recommendations for the International Conference, on the objective of the Conference, the draft agenda, draft rules of procedure, and final documents, including a programme of action. The dates and venue of the Conference itself have not yet been decided. A decision on the modalities for attendance of non-governmental organizations was also deferred for further consideration. Those questions will be taken up again by the second and third Preparatory Committees, respectively 8–19 January and 19–30 March 2001.

The Chairman, Ambassador Carlos dos Santos (Mozambique), will be conducting intensive consultations on outstanding issues between now and the convening of the second session.

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Nuclear Issues

Secretary-General Proposes Major International Conference on Eliminating Nuclear Dangers

“Whatever rationale [nuclear] weapons may once have had,” stated the Secretary-General in his Report to the Millennium Assembly dated 27 March, “has long since dwindled. Political, moral and legal constraints on actually using them further undermine their strategic utility without, however, reducing the risks of inadvertent war or proliferation.”

The Secretary-General underlined that the situation with respect to nuclear weapons would be “less alarming” if steady progress were being made towards disarmament. “Not only are the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks stalled, but there are no negotiations at all covering the many thousands of so-called tactical nuclear weapons in existence, or

“There was a deplorable lack of progress on disarmament and international security issues,” noted the Secretary-General in a message to the Conference on Disarmament at its opening meeting of the year 2000 session in January. “The fact that the Conference remained deadlocked on these issues,” he continued, “was part of a wider and disturbing stagnation in the overall disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.”

The lull in negotiations continued in the Conference through the end of the first part of its session on 24 March. Having adopted its agenda at the first meeting this year, the sixty-one member Conference was not able to agree on a programme of work owing to the continued divergence of views on the priorities of the international disarmament agenda in the current international situation.

The Conference will hold the second part of its session from 22 May to 2 July and third part from 7 August to 22 September 2000.

the weapons of any nuclear power other than those of the Russian Federation and the United States of America.”

“Above all else”, he said, “we need a reaffirmation of political commitment at the highest levels to reducing the dangers that arise both from existing nuclear weapons and from further proliferation”.

He proposed that consideration be given to convening a major international conference that would help to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers.

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30TH ANIVERSARY OF THE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY

When the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons entered into force thirty years ago, on 5 March 1970, it was hailed as the most important international agreement in the field of disarmament since the start of the nuclear age. Now, with its nearly universal membership of 187 States parties, including the five nuclear-weapon States, it is considered the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In a statement marking the occasion, the Secretary-General said that the international community “should immediately start taking new and effective measures to achieve the inherently linked goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation” in order to reach the ultimate objective of a world free of nuclear weapons. He also emphasized that efforts to seek the elimination of nuclear weapons should remain a high priority.

The Review Conference of the States parties is taking place at United Nations Headquarters from 24 April to 19 May 2000. At its last major review in 1995, when the Treaty was extended indefinitely, agreements were reached on principles and objectives of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, ways to improve the review process and a resolution on Middle East issues.

The Secretary-General called for all parties at the forthcoming Conference to reaffirm their commitment to the Treaty.

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THE 12th REGIONAL DISARMAMENT MEETING IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION Kathmandu, Nepal

As a part of the “Kathmandu process”, initiated more than a decade ago, the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific held its 12th regional disarmament meeting in the capital city of Nepal from 15 to 17 February 2000. The meeting brought together disarmament and security experts from within and outside of the region to discuss “Strategic stability, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and the 2000 Review Conference of the NPT Parties”.

One objective of the meeting was to help the Asia-Pacific community to prepare for the 2000 NPT Review Conference. A spectrum of issues under this rubric was examined, including procedural matters, objectives and goals of the Conference, responsibilities of the nuclear-weapon States and the situations of Northeast Asia and the Middle East.

In summing up that discussion, Rebecca Johnson of the ACRONYM Institute pointed out that there was a widespread sense that the Middle East question was likely to be central to NPT deliberations at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Also addressed from a regional perspective were the issues of missile proliferation, preventing an arms race in outer space, the situation in South Asia, and the consolidation and strengthening of Mongolia’s nuclear-weapon-free status.

The opening statement of the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Jayantha Dhanapala, is available on the DDA website. ♦ UNDDA

**MICHAEL DOUGLAS TURNS
SPOTLIGHT ON
NUCLEAR ISSUES**

At a press conference in July 1998 on the day he was appointed United Nations Messenger of Peace, Michael Douglas spoke of his belief that it is a human right to feel the security that comes of not having to be afraid of nuclear weapons. The Secretary-General, in his Report to the Millennium Assembly, expressed the belief that the 21st century challenge of “freedom from fear” included eliminating the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Actor and producer Douglas has been turning his attention again to nuclear matters.

He reminded British Parliamentarians recently that he was first confronted with nuclear issues when he was involved with the making of the film “The China Syndrome” in 1979. Three weeks after the movie opened, the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster occurred.

Addressing an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Security and Non-Proliferation in the United Kingdom’s House of Commons on 20 March, Mr. Douglas recalled that he was deeply concerned when nuclear physicists told him that 135 of the 160 fail-safe steps at Three Mile Island had failed, almost exactly as had happened in the film. That had started him on the cause, he remarked.

The Messenger of Peace appealed for help from the MPs in preventing the unravelling of three treaties that are key to international security today: the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the bilateral Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Meeting with Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Minister Peter Hain, he urged the United Kingdom to take a leadership role in pressing for further nuclear arms reductions.

Coinciding with his House of Commons appearance, the American political commentary magazine *George*, in its April 2000 issue, published on its cover a portrait of Mr. Douglas as an anti-nuclear protestor, with NO NUKES written in bold black letters across his face. ♦ UNDDA

BW Issues

BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION PROTOCOL

Work is proceeding steadily in the negotiations on a protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). The Ad Hoc Group of the States Parties to the BWC continued in Geneva, with the holding of its nineteenth session from 13 to 31 March 2000. Established by a Special Conference of the States party to the Convention in 1994, the Group is required to consider four areas: (1) definitions of terms and objective criteria; (2) to incorporate existing and further enhanced confidence-building and transparency measures, as appropriate, into the regime; (3) a system of measures to promote compliance with the Convention; and (4) specific measures designed to ensure the effective and full implementation of Article X (technical cooperation).

The Ad Hoc Group has two additional sessions scheduled this year (10 July–4 August and 13–24 November). It is reserving two weeks for further meetings, if necessary. The Group is mandated to conclude its work at the latest by the Fifth Review Conference of the Convention to be held in 2001.

For further information, see DDA website. ♦ UNDDA

25th ANNIVERSARY OF BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

Events took place at New York and Geneva to mark the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) on 26 March 2000. The BWC was the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

“Every effort must be made by the international community to ensure that advancements made in biotechnology are applied towards the improvement of life on our planet and never for purposes running counter to the provisions of the Biological Weapons Convention,”

affirmed the Secretary-General in a statement issued on the occasion of its anniversary. In his Millennium Report issued on 27 March, the Secretary-General underscored that “advances in biotechnology are increasing the potential threat posed by biological weapons.”

At UN Headquarters, the Department for Disarmament Affairs held a symposium on 24 March on “Strengthening the BWC: International Cooperation and Exchanges in the Field of Biotechnology” in cooperation with the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB, Trieste, Italy). The theme of the symposium was the impact of the advancements in biotechnology on the biological weapons non-proliferation regime and new initiatives for the use of biotechnology for peaceful purposes.

At the Palais des Nations in Geneva, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) cooperated with Bradford University Department of Peace Studies, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS), the International Security Information Service (ISIS) and the Verification, Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC), to conduct a seminar to assess the role played by the Convention in controlling the threat of biological weapons and the importance of the ongoing efforts in the Ad Hoc Group of the States Parties to the Convention to strengthen it. ♦ UNDDA

The Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, meeting in New York from 31 January to 2 February, warned the Secretary-General about a possible new arms race in ballistic missiles and urged him to combat widespread public and governmental complacency with respect to increasingly alarming threats to international security. The Board proposed that the United Nations undertake a study on the concept of disarmament and non-proliferation education, and would propose a mandate for such a study at its next session in Geneva, from 5 to 7 July 2000.



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Agreement on fundamental issues is essential in order for the International Conference in 2001 to agree on substantive recommendations for action.

Statements relating to small arms by the Secretary-General, documents and press releases of the Preparatory Committee are available on the DDA website, Conventional Arms Branch.

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AFRICAN SUBREGION ADOPTS DECLARATION ON SMALL ARMS

The Foreign Ministers of ten African countries met in Kenya, 12–15 March 2000, adopting the “Nairobi Declaration on the Problem of the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa”.

The Ministers placed their meeting and Declaration in the framework of the process leading to the 2001 United Nations International Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. They also associated the Declaration closely with the African common position on small arms adopted at the OAU Summit in Algiers in July 1999.

In a six-page statement of intent, the Ministers of Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania expressed their grave concern over the proliferation of small arms and the “devastating consequences they have had in sustaining armed conflict and abetting terrorism, cattle rustling and other serious crimes in the region.” They were especially appalled at the effects of armed conflicts on women and children and by the “unconscionable exploitation of children in armed conflicts.”

The signers of the Declaration drew up an ambitious programme of cooperation and coordination on small arms proliferation among themselves, and appealed for assistance of the United Nations, the OAU and other international organizations in its implementation. They also



States signatories of the Nairobi Declaration on Small Arms

requested assistance in carrying out a detailed study on the problem of illicit arms within the region and in drawing up appropriate programmes for the collection and destruction of illicit small arms and light weapons.

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<http://www.un.org/Dept/dda/DDAHome.htm>

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