

2017 Session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission

Mr KIM Won-soo, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Opening Remarks

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Madam Chair, Ms Gabriela Martinic, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset, I want to start with three thanks. First, to Madam Chair for accepting the challenging task that is concluding this session of the UN Disarmament Commission.

Second, to the departing chair, Ambassador Oto Tevi of Vanuatu, for his dedicated stewardship of last year's session and inter-sessional consultations thereafter.

Third, to the two departing chairs of the working groups, Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, now Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan, and Mr. Bouchaib Eloumni of Morocco. Both skilfully presided over the work of the groups for the two previous sessions. They have now assumed prominent new assignments, which I believe they fully deserve.

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates

2017 is the final year of this body's three-year cycle. The Commission is expected to complete the work of its two working groups and provide recommendations to the General Assembly.

This year marks sixty-five years since the first Disarmament Commission was established by the General Assembly. Its mission was to address the international community's "anxiety at the general lack of confidence plaguing the world and leading to the burden of increasing armaments."

This mission is valid now, more than ever.

We are witnessing rising global and regional tensions; new and destabilising arms competitions in both strategic and conventional weaponry; worrying policy trends that threaten to roll back the gains made since the end of the Cold War; and a dearth of outcomes from disarmament institutions, including this body.

We need to work harder to reverse these trends.

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates

We have seen the emergence of new technologies with the potential to negatively impact international peace and security. These comprise both high-end weapons systems, as well as

new applications for the revolutionary technologies that have primarily been pursued by the private and academic sectors.

From cyber security and artificial intelligence to hypersonic missiles, these new technologies also create a double-blurring of the line, both between strategic and non-strategic weapons and between nuclear and conventional weapons.

Addressing these new trends requires a comprehensive approach. In this connection, our goals have always been broader than eliminating or restricting single categories of weapons. Disarmament was meant as an integrated approach to address the larger problem of war and to facilitate arrangements for the collective maintenance of international security.

This is the logic around which the concept of General and Complete Disarmament is built.

Creating a new paradigm for sustainable security requires looking at how to modernise the concept of General and Complete Disarmament for the 21st century.

This is the approach also taken by the original Disarmament Commission. This session has an opportunity to revitalise this approach by considering the recommendations of the two working groups holistically, as mutually reinforcing elements of a greater whole.

As the only universal deliberative body, this Commission can through its inclusive engagement and with a willingness to seek compromise and exercise flexibility make a meaningful contribution to the revitalization of General and Complete Disarmament.

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates

Now I would like to turn to the issues related to outer space. It is an area that is especially ripe for consideration. Its recent history is promising.

The group of governmental experts on transparency and confidence-building measures, established by the General Assembly at Russia's initiative in 2012, successfully concluded its work in 2013. The subsequent General Assembly resolution was jointly sponsored by China, the Russian Federation and the United States – a rare display of unity on a strategic issue of such magnitude.

The First and Fourth Committee held their first ever joint ad hoc meeting on addressing the challenges of outer space security and sustainability in October 2015. The meeting showed how much work remains to be done to reconcile competing views. Nevertheless, it provided a useful opportunity to debate these differences and search for common ground.

I sincerely appreciate the efforts made by former Chairs, Ambassadors Drobnjak of Croatia, Seck of Senegal and Tevi of Vanuatu, to bring this issue before the Commission and for deepening the discussions and cooperation between the communities concerned with the safety and security of outer space efforts. I also commend the flexibility shown by all States in allowing this to happen.

Achieving the implementation of outer space TCBMs would be an indispensable step towards the prevention of an arms race in outer space. As outer space is our common heritage, the issue deserves to be addressed in a universal body.

Last month the Secretary-General issued a report on the implementation of outer space TCBMs by the United Nations system. I hope this report, and the gaps it identifies, will serve as a practical guide for your informal discussions. Those discussions may help to explore various ideas to ensure that space remains free from conflict and unsustainable practices. I look forward to productive deliberations on the issue.

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates

I would like to conclude by noting that there are high expectations for progress in 2017, including from this body.

A number of important events are taking place, especially for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Disarmament Commission falls exactly in the middle of two of them: the negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination and the commencement of the crucial 2020 NPT review cycle.

We therefore have good opportunities for action on numerous fronts in a busy disarmament agenda. Success in your deliberations at this Commission can set a positive tone and provide new impetus for achieving progress on our collective efforts to strengthen disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.

I wish you the best for a fruitful session.

I thank you so much.