



Remarks to the Conference on Disarmament

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United Nations**



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Mr. President, Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year, I had the honour of addressing this body near the closing of your session. Today, I have the great privilege of speaking at the opening of your work in the New Year.

Since last September, Secretary-General Guterres has repeatedly raised alarms that “Global anxieties about nuclear weapons are the highest since the Cold War.” While we have welcomed the progress made this month in the inter-Korean talks and all other efforts that have contributed to easing tensions, such engagement must still be translated into the resumption of sincere dialogue leading to sustainable peace and denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula.

While we have welcomed the second anniversary of “Implementation Day” under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear programme, there have been continued reports of uncertainty regarding the commitment of participants to its long-term preservation. We believe that the JCPOA is a strong testament to the power of diplomacy and collective action in resolving non-proliferation challenges, and the Secretary-General calls for the continued full commitment of ALL participants.

And while the Russian Federation and the United States appear to be on track to accomplish agreed reductions of the nuclear arsenals by next month – a milestone for which they must be commended – there do not appear to be any negotiations underway for further reductions beyond the expiration of New START in 2021. Other nuclear-armed States, despite unilateral measures some have enacted, remain unconstrained by similarly binding constraints or verification.

Beyond these specific issues, we are deeply troubled by signs that nuclear disarmament commitments may no longer be valued, that there is active consideration of increasing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines, and that programmes continue to be pursued for upgrading, enhancing and extending existing nuclear arsenals. Consensus over the right approach for nuclear disarmament remains fractured.

Looking beyond issues of nuclear disarmament, global military expenditures now exceed Cold War levels. Taboos against the use of chemical weapons and nuclear testing have been repeatedly challenged. Contemporary armed conflicts continue to devastate the lives of civilians and the infrastructure they rely on. And, as I warned this body in September, our international peace and security architecture is struggling to keep up with the implications posed by emerging military capabilities and new technologies.

I believe that the time has come to ask once again what this Conference and the entire United Nations disarmament machinery is prepared and able to do to effectively address the challenges posed by this state of affairs.

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Secretary-General remains committed to the Conference on Disarmament and looks forward to an opportunity this year to address you in person. In the lead-up to this, we intend to devote significant attention to working with the Presidents and members of the Conference on facilitating the resumption of negotiations this year.

As we focus for one more time on how to get this Conference back to its core business, the Secretary-General has decided that it will also be important to consider how to give new momentum and impetus to global disarmament efforts.

This decision reflects a belief that the current international situation underscores the need to reframe and modernize long-standing disarmament and non-proliferation priorities, as well as tackling new challenges. It also is a recognition that deepening divisions and persistent stagnation in this field are exacerbating international tensions and creating new dangers.

We believe that many aspects of the traditional disarmament agenda could be re-energized by being clearly linked to, and positioned centrally within, contemporary priorities.

For instance, the over-accumulation and proliferation of arms remain among the largest factors driving the potential for international armed conflict, and point to a need to more effectively integrate disarmament into various UN prevention actions.

In the area of humanitarian actions, the increasingly urbanized nature of armed conflict has brought new attention to the growing impact of the use of conventional weapons on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

On the important relationship between disarmament and development, in addition to reducing illicit arms flows, there is a need to strengthen links between the achievement of various disarmament objectives and many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is hoped that a fresh perspective on traditional disarmament objectives from the lens of the contemporary concerns could thus give new momentum and impetus to global disarmament efforts at a time when the need for disarmament is once again at the forefront of international attention.

Your efforts to bring this body – Conference on Disarmament – back to its important business will have a critical impact on how we can collectively re-energize and modernize our disarmament actions. Let us work with you, support your efforts to the best of our ability as the Secretariat, but we can only be effective if you bring to this historical conference room your political will to work together.

The Secretary-General will look for an opportunity to deliver a major address in the first half of this year, outlining his agenda for disarmament. On his behalf, I am committed to pursuing a multi-stakeholder approach in working to develop this agenda. We look forward to engaging with you in various settings in the months ahead on this initiative.

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In his remarks to the Security Council Open Debate on “Addressing Complex Contemporary Challenges to International Peace and Security”, the Secretary-General made three points which are particularly salient to our present conundrums.

“First, we are seeing not only a quantitative but also a qualitative change in threats to international peace and security. The perils of nuclear weapons are again front and centre ... Cybersecurity dangers are escalating ... The number of armed conflicts has declined over the long-term, but in the Middle East and parts of Africa, conflicts have surged.”

“Second, the changing nature of conflict means rethinking our approaches – both how we work and how we work with others.”

“Third, prevention must be at the centre of everything we do.”

It is my hope that this perspective can be part of the solution that unlocks the path toward a safer and more secure world.

Thank you very much.