



**Remarks by High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu
at the first meeting of the 2018 session of the
United Nations Disarmament Commission**

(Delivered by Director and Deputy to the High Representative
Mr. Thomas Markram)



New York
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Her Excellency, Ambassador Gillian Bird,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. At the outset, I wish to congratulate Ambassador Gillian Bird on her election and to assure her of the full cooperation and support of the Secretariat.

Just six months ago, the Secretary-General warned the General Assembly about the growing nuclear peril. He was concerned foremost over the bellicose rhetoric and escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, which was driving the situation to a state of crisis. He was also concerned over the deterioration of commitments to strategic arms control in other quarters, and the impact this could have on the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In addition, we have seen on-going the use of chemical weapons with impunity in the Syrian Arab Republic. The use of heavy weapons and explosives in populated areas has continued to devastate the lives of civilians and the infrastructure they rely on. And accelerating advances in science and technology are giving rise to new methods and means of warfare with potential undesirable or unclear consequences.

It was against this backdrop that the Secretary-General announced his intention to develop his agenda for disarmament, with a central focus on “disarmament that saves lives”. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has been pursuing an inclusive and multi-stakeholder approach in the development of this agenda, and we are working towards its release later this spring.

Since September, there have been no fundamental changes in the interrelated trends that are eroding efficacy in arms control and negatively affecting international peace and security. However, there have been some recent signs of progress that point to where this body can make a unique and constructive contribution as it begins its new cycle.

The Secretary-General was encouraged by the announcement that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States will hold a summit meeting by May. In this connection, the reported commitment by the DPRK to denuclearization following the recent talks held in China is a welcomed development. We hope these positive developments will be the start of a longer process of sincere dialogue leading to sustainable peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

In February, the Secretary-General also congratulated the Russian Federation and the United States on successfully reducing their strategic nuclear forces to the levels required by the New START Treaty. It remains imperative for this step to be followed with sustained leadership and dialogue resulting in further reductions and irreversible progress towards disarmament. At a time when global anxieties about nuclear weapons are higher than at any time since the Cold War, measures for disarmament and arms control are more vital than ever.

It has therefore been encouraging to see some small but important signs of new life in United Nations disarmament bodies. The decision by the Conference on Disarmament to establish subsidiary bodies is a good innovation, and its significance will ultimately be judged by whether or not it leads to the resumption of negotiations. For its part, this Commission so far has been able to consolidate its successful session last year by starting its new cycle with the early adoption of its agenda, including the first new topic it has taken up in eighteen years.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

With respect to the substantive matters before you, in the area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, everyone in this room should be well aware of the difficulties and the divisions. As a universal body with a mandate to make every effort to reach consensus, the Commission can only hope to realize progress if it avoids relitigating outcomes from other processes and reopening irreconcilable disputes.

A strength of this body is its universal membership, which ensures an inclusive discussion involving all the key stakeholders.

One possible starting point for your deliberations is the most recent moment of consensus on the future of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. That was namely the outcome of the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which was endorsed by nearly all the States in this room.

While that document has not been endorsed by the UN, the substance of many of the actions it contains reflect universal principles and aspirations, and as such there could be value in a body such as this one exploring ways in which it can support the implementation of those objectives.

An important lesson we have learned from past decades is that in times when disarmament negotiations have been difficult, the pursuit of collateral measures for arms control have helped to build confidence, ease tensions and create an environment that favours eventually progress.

In the nuclear field, such collateral measures, many of which now constitute elements of the now-traditional step-by-step approach, were primarily developed as a means for halting and reversing the arms race. Discussion on broader matters affecting strategic security could help unlock the current stalemate and prevent the emergence of a new arms race. Important collateral measures that are possibly ripe for agreement include risk reduction, transparency and commitments for reciprocal non-use.

One specific collateral measure for disarmament on which this body should certainly be able to make a contribution is the goal of preserving outer space as a realm free of conflict.

Several recent trends are impacting the security and sustainability of outer space activities. These include: the massive growth in the number and diversity of actors operating in outer space, including governments and the private sector; the proliferation of hazardous space debris; increasing dependence on outer space in the civilian, government and military sectors; the continued development and spread of terrestrial-based missiles capable of functioning as anti-satellite weapons; and the continued development of technologies and concepts with potential application in counter-space systems.

As long as some continue to see outer space as a potential realm for war-fighting, we will face increasing risk of weaponization and conflict. And we can be certain that any such conflict would bring devastating consequences. Thankfully, despite geopolitical and strategic tensions, there continues to be common ground among the major space-faring nations and other space actors on ways to make progress in a number of areas.

One of these areas has been the implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs). Such measures can serve to reduce risks by mitigating misunderstanding and clarifying uncertainty regarding intentions and capabilities. They can also serve as a basis for verifiable approaches for outer space arms control and for the subsequent development of legally binding instruments.

Given that the use of and access to outer space affects all countries, it is essential for TCBMs to be considered in an inclusive setting. The Commission's deliberations on outer space TCBMs are therefore an opportunity for Member States to review and help put into practice the recommendations contained in the 2013 report of the group of governmental experts.

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will end by citing the remarks of the Secretary-General in his address to the Conference on Disarmament this year:

[QUOTE]

Disarmament and arms control are complex projects comprising many small steps. Each one affects the whole. Each gas attack, each nuclear test, takes us into greater danger. We cannot contemplate further erosion of the global framework for disarmament. Indeed, we must reverse it urgently.

[UNQUOTE]

As is the case with our Geneva-based colleagues, you are off to the best start we have seen in many years. I hope you use this opportunity wisely and I wish you all the best for a successful session.

Thank you very much.
