

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

Geneva, 26 February 2018

Madame President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be here. I thank you for your work and particularly for the serious efforts you have made, including this year, to find ways to break the long-standing stalemate in this Conference.

I welcome the decision you took ten days ago to take forward your substantive work. The most difficult part now lies ahead, as you work to translate [this] into the resumption of negotiations.

Disarmament and arms control are top priorities for me. And they are central to the system for international security agreed in the United Nations Charter.

The dangers of nuclear weapons are all too clear. They pose a catastrophic risk to human life and to the environment.

And there is great and justified anxiety around the world about the threat of nuclear war.

In East Asia, millions of people face this threat up close on a daily basis. I commend their patience and resilience, which I witnessed first-hand during my visit to the Republic of Korea earlier this month.

And we have seen some positive developments over recent weeks.

And I welcome the courageous initiatives taken by the Republic of Korea during the Olympic Games.

But this is not enough. We need lasting improvements, based on the central objective of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and sustainable peace in the region.

I also welcome the completion of reductions by the United States and the Russian Federation under the New START treaty.

We need further disarmament and arms control measures as a sound basis for global peace.

And the Conference on Disarmament is a critical global forum for progress.

Madame President, Excellencies,

Disarmament and arms control have achieved important gains. They have reduced inventories of strategic nuclear weapons; entirely prohibited chemical and biological weapons; and led to agreed prohibitions and limits on the use of indiscriminate weapons including land mines and cluster munitions.

But the first resolution of the General Assembly – seeking the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction – remains unfulfilled. There are currently some 15,000 nuclear weapons on earth.

The danger posed by these weapons inspired the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that opened for signature last year.

In recent years, long-standing goals, including reductions in military spending and armed forces, have been seemingly forgotten. Military power is celebrated and glorified, without reference to the obscene human cost of conflict.

At the same time, the global arms trade has reached the highest level since the Cold War, fuelling regional conflict. Global military spending remains at well over \$1.5 trillion per year.

Strategic tensions are returning and jeopardizing gains in non-proliferation, as countries persist in the belief that nuclear weapons make the world safer.

Non-state actors, including terrorists, pose an enormous threat to global disarmament efforts.

Science and technology are accelerating the development of new kinds of autonomous and remotely-controlled weapons, challenging normative frameworks.

Nuclear weapons are being re-evaluated as tactical battlefield munitions – a dangerous prospect.

Meanwhile, the impact of war has moved from frontlines to front doors. Armed conflicts are killing more and more civilians, as governments and non-state armed groups use powerful explosive weapons in populated areas.

Weapons of war are marketed and traded for profit like ordinary consumer goods.

And taboos against the use of chemical weapons and nuclear testing have been repeatedly challenged.

In the face of this deterioration, the international community must urgently rebuild a common vision on disarmament and arms control.

Madame President, Excellencies,

In response to these concerns, I am preparing, in support of Member States, a new initiative aimed at giving greater impetus and direction to the global disarmament agenda.

This initiative is aimed at restoring the role of disarmament as an integral component of our work to maintain international peace and security.

I believe we can build a new vision for disarmament to address today's priorities: conflict prevention, upholding humanitarian principles, promoting sustainable development and dealing with future threats.

On prevention, we must respond to the dangers of the over-accumulation and proliferation of weapons, and reinforce the need to integrate disarmament into the United Nations' efforts on preventive diplomacy and peacemaking.

At the global level, we must work together towards forging a new momentum on eliminating nuclear weapons.

On humanitarian action, we need to focus on the growing and unacceptable impact of conventional weapons on civilians and infrastructure, particularly in urban areas, which represents also a clear violation of human rights. We need to focus on the disarmament that saves lives.

On sustainable development, we need to strengthen the links between disarmament and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reduce the illicit arms flows that feed conflict and divert resources, and understand the dire economic consequences of excessive military spending.

Finally, we need to examine the potential risks and challenges posed by the weapons of the future. And this includes the relationship between new technologies – autonomous and unmanned weapons, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and space-based systems – and international humanitarian and human rights law.

My initiative will strive to offer a new perspective on traditional priorities; and a clear vision for the future; and also, practical and implementable actions.

The challenges are enormous, but history shows that it has been possible to reach agreement on disarmament and arms control even at the most difficult moments.

I have asked my High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to reach out to a broad spectrum of actors to develop this initiative further, including all partners within the UN system, leading experts, Member States and civil society.

Madame President,

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.

We must bring the current review process of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to a successful outcome in 2020.

This cornerstone treaty must remain strong for non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear power.

And we must bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force without delay.

We must enforce the Chemical Weapons Convention and ensure accountability for violations.

And we must reinvigorate the agenda for disarmament and arms control and put it back on course.

We must work together towards our common goal: a world free of nuclear weapons.

As Secretary-General, I am committed to doing everything within my authority to contribute to the success of the Conference on Disarmament.

In turn, I ask you to intensify your efforts to find consensus on the way forward.

I believe you are off to the best start in nearly two decades, and I look forward to building on this new momentum.

Thank you very much.