



Remarks on Capacities for Disarmament

By

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Exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and other High-Level Officials on the “Current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament and the role of international organizations with mandates in this field”

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I welcome the opportunity to participate in this high-level panel of inter-governmental organizations working in the field of disarmament.

While we all have many different responsibilities, all of the organizations represented on this panel share a common cause. We are working to strengthen international peace and security through activities related to the elimination and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Our existence as international organizations is living testimony to one indisputable fact: our Member States recognize that they require such organizations to achieve their common aims. It is therefore essential that we perform our mandates as efficiently and effectively as possible, especially given the stakes involved in the acquisition, proliferation or use of all types of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons.

In terms of capacities for action, the primary responsibility rests where it always has—with the Member States. It is their policies, laws, regulations, plans, budgets, votes, and institutions together that determine what is possible to achieve in disarmament and non-proliferation. Skilled and highly motivated secretariats of international organizations certainly have their contributions to make, but they alone cannot substitute for the capacities and political will of the Member States. When these State policies and priorities are in alignment, great progress is possible through multilateral cooperation, as we have seen in the very existence of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and five regional nuclear-weapon-free zones.

Any mismatch, however, between these domestic instruments and a country's international commitments presents a problem that ultimately each country must itself resolve. Commitments to negotiate in good faith on nuclear disarmament, for example, are not discretionary, but are a solemn responsibility of all States. This suggests that the first place to look in understanding the lack of progress in disarmament or in non-proliferation rests in the degree of harmony between domestic policies and international responsibilities, more so I believe than with the structures or procedures of these international organizations.

In this sense, our organizations function very much as messengers: our successes and failures serve as indicators of the health of the various multilateral treaties, regimes, and norms to address challenges relating to weapons of mass destruction. The obstacles and stalemates we encounter are not of our own making as international organizations, but are instead better seen as evidence of the extent that disarmament and non-proliferation are very much “works in progress” for each of our Member States.

If our international organizations can provide a venue in which these challenges can be overcome, if we can help to broker compromises, if we can assist in building common ground, if we can perform functions that cannot be reasonably performed by individual States acting alone, if we can serve as a reservoir of institutional memory of the triumphs and setbacks of past multilateral initiatives, then we will truly have served a useful function.

I would now like to discuss some specific recent instances when the United Nations has contributed to this great common cause and is strengthening its capacities for action.

My first case concerns how we handled allegations that chemical weapons had been used last year in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Our response depended very heavily upon the General Assembly's far-sighted vision in 1987 to mandate the establishment of the "Secretary-General's Mechanism" to investigate claimed uses of chemical and biological weapons. It was this mechanism that was used to confirm that chemical weapons had been used in Syria. Conducting such an investigation was certainly not easy, as I can personally testify as a member of the international team that visited Syria to make the necessary arrangements for the inspection.

The Secretary-General's report of the United Nations Mission to investigate these allegations, which he submitted in December 2013, was certainly not the end of the story. He informed the General Assembly on 13 December 2013 that "there is room for strengthening and improving the mechanism" and suggested holding a lessons learned exercise. Its focus, he said, should be on enhancing the preparedness of technical teams and enabling partner organizations to work more effectively under their common mandate of the mechanism.

I would like to underscore here that the United Nations has not simply reacted passively to external events. In 2006, well before the most recent events, the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to "update the roster of experts and laboratories, as well as the technical guidelines and procedures, available to him for the timely and efficient investigations of alleged use". In 2007, he convened two informal meetings of an international group of technical experts to update the appendices to the guidelines and procedures and ensure their consistency with state of the art scientific standards.

Currently a lessons-learned exercise is well underway, in partnership with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the World Health Organization, and outside experts. The first phase was successfully concluded earlier this year following a meeting of a core group of experts in Glion, Switzerland. Participants identified four broad categories of lessons learned that required future study, relating to the activation of the mechanism, forging strategic partnerships, training and information sharing, and maintaining the unity and consistency of the overall mission. We began earlier this month to explore the first two of these issues.

I would like to emphasize that this lessons-learned exercise has much broader significance than just an assessment of the experience of implementing chemical weapons investigations and disarmament in Syria. These lessons very much relate to the world community's recognition of a taboo against the use or very existence of chemical weapons anywhere. This work will help us to reach our common, long-sought goal of achieving a fully global ban on such weapons and their total elimination.

My second example today relates to our efforts to implement Security Council resolution 1540, which is marking its tenth anniversary this year.

I view this resolution as much more than an initiative focused just on preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their acquisition by non-State actors. By identifying these dangers, the resolution also implicitly recognized the inherent risks associated with all such weapons. To this extent, it has helped in the larger process of delegitimizing all WMD—which, let us not forget, was a class of weaponry identified by the first General Assembly resolution in 1946 for total elimination.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has helped to advance the goals of this resolution through three types of activities: facilitating national implementation; enhancing cooperation between international, regional, and sub-regional organizations, and building effective partnerships with key stakeholders including civil society and industry.

We help national implementation through our country visits and dialogues, through national round tables and peer reviews, and through various forms of technical assistance intended to strengthen national capacity.

We have cooperated very closely with other intergovernmental and regional organizations to advance the goals of this resolution. This is being pursued largely through national visits and regional meetings involving the exchange of information, assistance in training, and the provision of technical information and support.

We are also actively at work to deepen cooperation with non-governmental organizations, industry, academic and scientific communities in support of 1540 goals. I will not summarize all of this work on this occasion since this material is freely available on the UNODA's web site (www.un.org/disarmament).

Once again, I view this work as fully consistent with our mandated ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control. As I said, it helps in the wider process of de-legitimizing all WMD and this will I believe support our wider common cause.

While the United Nations and the international organizations have increasing capacities to deal with weapons of mass destruction, there is one area where this is conspicuously lacking.

Since the 2010 NPT Review Conference, we have seen tremendous new interest in better understanding the humanitarian impact of any use of nuclear weapons. The international conferences in Oslo and Nayarit made invaluable contributions in this regard. Most relevant to the topic of this panel, the discussions underscored that it would be unlikely that any State or international body could adequately address the immediate or long-term humanitarian consequences of any use of a nuclear weapon.

The recent study undertaken by UNIDIR at the request of UNDP and OCHA further underscored that the United Nations is unlikely to be able to offer much humanitarian assistance in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear weapon detonation. It confirmed what we have long known: that prevention is the only plausible policy response.

As the next step in this ongoing discussion, I look forward to the third humanitarian conference to be held in Vienna in December. I hope all States decide to attend this conference, which should deepen our collective understanding of the risks, consequences and legal framework pertaining to any use of nuclear weapons and to the legacy of nuclear testing.

Today, I have addressed only three capacity-related issues. I have no doubt whatsoever that the institutions represented on this panel today—including the United

Nations itself—has much to offer in assisting in the achievement of agreed multilateral goals of disarmament and non-proliferation.

In reflecting on the theme of this panel, I have come to the conclusion that this is not just a panel of international organizations, but in a larger sense a panel on international *organization* as a process. Our respective institutions are here to assist, to facilitate, and to promote collective action. We cannot possibly be expected to substitute for the primary role of Member States in fulfilling their own disarmament and non-proliferation responsibilities.

Our greatest prospects for success will come when we reach a harmonic alignment of three powerful forces: public opinion; enlightened leadership among the States possessing the deadliest of weapons; and organized cooperation among States that have relinquished WMD or seek their total elimination. Solve these challenges, and the obstacles that remain in the internal deliberative processes of inter-governmental organizations will rapidly disappear, for the greater benefit of all.

In his last annual report on the work of the organization (1961), Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld stated that the United Nations faced two alternative futures. It could limit its role to serving as “static conference machinery” or it could serve as a “dynamic instrument” in the service of the global interest. He left little doubt which future he preferred. The same choice is before us in the field of disarmament. Let us choose wisely.