Global Arms Control Instruments and their Contribution to Security in the OSCE Area

By

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like at the outset to thank you for inviting the Office for Disarmament Affairs to participate in this meeting. I also bring you greetings from the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Angela Kane, who could not attend due to other longstanding commitments.

I would like to focus my remarks on the topic of arms control and confidence-building measures, and will do so from the perspective of the United Nations. As you know, confidence-building measures and conflict prevention are at the core of the United Nations’ work and deeply rooted in its Charter. The UN Member States have solemn responsibilities to uphold, including abiding by the prohibition against the threat and use of force and committing to settling disputes by peaceful means. Confidence-building measures could be applied globally, at the regional or sub-regional levels, bilaterally and in some instances, unilaterally.

So how can arms control and confidence-building measures contribute to security in the OSCE area?

Let me start by underlining that the OSCE area has impressively advanced military confidence-building measures which have been agreed ‘between Vancouver and Vladivostok’. These contribute to building trust, predictability, transparency, and support rule-based solutions to possible conflicts.

Governments have the sovereign right and responsibility to provide security to their citizens and in this context, their armed forces, police and other security personnel legitimately employ a wide range of weaponry. But the build-up of weapons in one country, could lead to mistrust in another which in turn may
result in, arms races, crises, pre-emptive strikes, and – as we’ve tragically seen in history – full-fledged wars. Information exchange, transparency and confidence-building measures can reduce, or even eliminate, misunderstandings, mistrust and miscalculations with regard to the activities and intentions of States. That is why it is important for any country with military capabilities, to apply military confidence-building. Openness and constraint provide the reassurance that military capabilities will not be used for one-sided political gain.

The United Nations has two main instruments on military confidence-building: the UN Report on Military Expenditures, and the UN Register of Conventional Arms, both maintained by the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

The basis of both instruments is that every year governments would report on their military expenditures as well as on their recent imports and exports of conventional arms. We, at the Office for Disarmament Affairs, encourage the reporting by Member States to these two voluntary instruments precisely because of the benefit they offer in confidence-building. The provided information is made available online, so that government officials, regional organizations, academia and journalists could benefit from this rich source of military data.

As we’ve heard today, the spectrum of military confidence-building measures or “CBMs” is of course much wider than these two UN reporting mechanisms. Recently, the Secretary-General was requested to prepare a global inventory of military CBMs. Many countries contributed to this exercise. The result was a rich set of possible measures, which can be tapped into by any Member State interested in pursuing improved security relationships in any region. This
inventory of military CBMs can be divided into three categories of possible actions.

First, **information exchange measures**

Such measures seek to enhance mutual understanding of national military capabilities/activities. They facilitate communication to avoid surprises or unsought military confrontations. Examples of such measures include:

- Appointing military points of contact;
- Establishing a hotline between chiefs of the armed forces;
- Exchanging military information on national forces and armaments;
- Giving advance notification of military manoeuvres;
- Notifying, unilaterally, of reduction and disposal of weapons and ammunition.

The second category of regional military CBMs consists of **observation and verification measures**.

These measures aim at generating trust by allowing States to monitor each other’s military facilities and activities. They help corroborate that a party’s military activities are of a non-aggressive nature and that they are organized only in the context of military activities, or of planning for such activities, in conformity with UN Charter. Examples of such measures include:

- Inviting observers to monitor major military exercises and missions to evaluate on-site the information provided by a Government on its military units and equipment.
- Inspections modalities can range from in-person verification, to electronic sensing systems, to photography from aerial observation flights.
And thirdly, there are the **military constraint measures**.

These are designed to limit the capacity for offensive and especially surprise military attacks. Examples of such measures include:

- Restricting the number and scope of major military exercises;
- Limiting the type and amounts of equipment;
- Limiting troop movements;
- De-alerting weapons systems;
- Establishing demilitarized zones or weapon-free zones.

Countries may also wish to consider inviting observers to monitor and evaluate on site the information provided by a Government on its military units and equipment. They can also establish a bilateral or regional dialogue on their respective defence white papers. The key point here is that reporting to the United Nations is only a first step towards confidence building. The reports we receive and share, should be seen as the foundation upon which further, tailored, confidence-building measures can be built.

Of course, many of the measures I mentioned are already being applied in the OSCE area. However, this year we have seen how easily CBMs can erode, agreements can be brushed aside, and distrust can return. That is why we value this meeting so much – it confirms that peace and security can only last if the hard work of confidence-building across borders is not abandoned.

In this context, it is important to underline that shared development of military confidence-building can be done in the most challenging of strategic settings.
For CBMs to work between any two or more countries, it is not essential to have a shared assessment of the security situation neither is it essential to have reached equality in military capabilities. What is needed is a shared desire to avoid escalation or accidental conflict.

The advantage of military CBMs lies precisely in their flexibility. Member States can “pick-and-choose” which CBMs are most suitable to them. Finding CBMs that work, is not about searching the key to lasting peace. It’s about agreeing on just a first few small, incremental steps, and building trust from there. And if they turn out not to work, to not give up but to try a slightly different route, until a measure is found that all involved parties feel comfortable with.

Military CBMs, are solid anchors for building reciprocal trust. They are preludes to more comprehensive agreements, such as binding peace settlements or arms control treaties.

In closing, I wish to stress that CBMs are small investments with a high return value. The costs of measures such as the setting up of a hotline, or a regular conference to discuss defence plans, or inspection visits, are typically not very high – much smaller than the average price for the acquisition of new weaponry.

The United Nations stands ready to work with any country or group of countries to further develop and apply military CBMs tailored to their specific national and regional situations.
Thank you.