"Multilateral Initiatives to Achieve a Nuclear Weapons Free World and the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons"

Remarks to the 2015 PNND Assembly

Mr KIM Won-soo

Under Secretary-General
Acting High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations

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Mr Ivo Bárek, Vice-President of the Senate of the Czech Republic

Ms Alena Gajdůšková, PNND Council member and adviser to the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

Mr Karipbek Kuyukov, Ambassador of the ATOM Project

Former PNND Presidents: Ms Tarja Cronberg, Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar, Baroness Sue Miller and Mr Bill Kidd

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be here today. I would like to thank the Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament for inviting me to participate. I also want to thank PNND for its tireless work in the cause of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including through its ‘Unfold Zero’ project.

Parliamentarians and the United Nations secretariat have many things in common. For example, you are responsible to your constituencies and, similarly, we are responsible to the UN’s Member States. The UN’s Parliament is the General Assembly. Our ‘constituency’ is very broad and is not shy in telling us what they think of our performance – good or bad. This is something with which I am sure you can sympathise!

As parliamentarians, you have many competing priorities on your agenda. That you are here today shows that the elimination of nuclear weapons is a priority for you, just as it is for Secretary-General Ban and just as it has been for the UN throughout its seventy-year history.

Our job, together, is to ensure it remains a priority for the entire international community.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As you all know, the UN was recently privileged to hear His Holiness, Pope Francis, address the General Assembly. His Holiness delivered a clear message: The international community must act as one to tackle the problems of development and peace and security. He emphasised that in addressing these
challenges, we, the international community must remember their critical human dimensions.

His Holiness outlined two existential threats facing the world: Climate change and the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Secretary-General Ban has also made clear the top priority that he accords to these two global challenges to humanity. In December, the world will come together to find a way forward on climate change. We must also refocus and reenergise our attention to nuclear disarmament.

In 2009, the Secretary-General presented to the world his Five Point Proposal on Nuclear Disarmament. The Proposal outlined the need for multilateral initiatives on nuclear disarmament – either a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments or a nuclear-weapons convention, backed by a strong system of verification.

The Proposal helped create a positive atmosphere and stimulated real progress. Unfortunately, as we all know, nuclear disarmament has suffered serious setbacks in recent years. I believe that now is the time to revitalise our efforts. The Secretary-General’s proposal remains relevant for this purpose.

UN Member States’ concerns about the grave dangers posed by nuclear weapons are deeply and genuinely held. This is one reason why so many States have supported the humanitarian consequences movement. This movement has made a real contribution to the disarmament debate, by seeking to place human concerns at the forefront. It is one of the headline issues at this year’s meeting of the First Committee of the General Assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen

I believe that problems become much harder to manage without a process. I have urged UN Member States to develop an inclusive process that can re-energise the prospects for multilateral nuclear disarmament, a process that will allow disparate views to be heard and, hopefully, reconciled.

The First Committee currently has several proposals before it for an Open-Ended Working Group that could act as such a process. It is now up to States to show the necessary flexibility to achieve consensus on this issue.
Of course, these proposals are not ends in themselves. But they could be first steps towards bridging current divides.

I think we can all agree that there are a range of initiatives that can reduce the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and support multilateral endeavours.

Because there is nothing to stop the international community from engaging in parallel initiatives. We should not delay on taking one move forward by making it dependent on another.

I want to highlight three examples of where we can pursue parallel tracks.

First, the United States and the Russian Federation – owners of the largest nuclear arsenals – need to revive bilateral disarmament momentum. Likewise, all nuclear-armed States should continue to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security strategies and build transparency into their nuclear programmes.

Second, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Fissile Material (Cut-off) Treaty are important elements for a world free of nuclear weapons, yet they continue to languish. There should be no excuse for the entry into force and universality of the former and the commencement of negotiations on the latter.

Third, implementation of the 64-point action plan agreed at the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference remains disappointingly slow. The action plan was agreed by consensus and all States parties must implement their commitments, without conditions.

We have some twenty months until the first Preparatory Committee meeting of the 2020 Review Cycle. We need to demonstrate substantive progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As the Secretary-General said in his letter to parliamentarians in 2010, there is much that you can do to assist the cause of a world free of nuclear weapons. I have three specific requests for you.

First, you can enact domestic legislation and ratify treaties. The CTBT is one example. For those parliaments that have ratified the CTBT, you should
encourage those 8 Annex 2 States and 25 non-Annex 2 states to do so expeditiously. Similarly, 100 States have ratified the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Those who have not should make it a priority.

Finally, the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1540 requires appropriate legislation and regulations. I know a vast majority of States have enacted legislation relevant to 1540. However, technology moves faster than policy and parliamentarians must remain vigilant to ensure their legislation is up-to-date. In this context, the Office for Disarmament Affairs will partner with the International Parliamentary Union for a conference on the implementation of 1540 in Africa later this year.

A second request I have for you is to use the ‘power of the purse’ – you can ensure that disarmament institutions and initiatives are sustainably financed.

I am sure you can all sympathise with the constant need to raise funds. Unfortunately, a number of disarmament instruments and institutions are facing serious funding problems. This has become a broad and very worrying trend. States need to fulfil their financial responsibilities, including the payment of outstanding contributions.

I ask you to please return to your capitals and convey this important message to your governments. We cannot begin to tackle the threat weapons of all kinds pose to our collective security unless we are adequately resourced to do so.

Third, you can be advocates for public awareness in your domestic constituencies. You can hold events, distribute educational material and raise the profile of nuclear disarmament.

As the world’s one true global body, the United Nations is the obvious home for multilateral initiatives to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. We stand ready to work together with you for the fulfilment of this vital goal.

Thank you.