15th Republic of Korea-United Nations Joint Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues

Opening Remarks

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning, It is great to see so many friendly faces in this room.

I am pleased to welcome you all to the fifteenth annual Republic of Korea and United Nations Joint Conference on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Issues. At the outset, I bring you the greetings of Secretary-General Ban and his best wishes for a successful conference. He is currently in Marrakesh for the climate change COP 22.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea, through Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and Deputy Minister Choi, for their generous support and hospitality.

I also want to thank all the experts and officials, many of whom have travelled great distances to provide their wisdom over the coming two days.

In our increasingly globalised world, solutions require broad coalitions of stakeholders – governments, civil society, business and international organisations – to overcome complex challenges. I am pleased to see representatives from across this spectrum.

It is always a great pleasure to be back in Jeju. This is a special place. Personally, because it is the place where I had my honeymoon 30 years ago. But on a more serious note, it is the only location awarded by UNESCO with triple crowns as World Natural Heritage, Global Geopark and Biosphere Reserve.

It has also been designated by the Korean government as an Island of Peace. It is very fitting to hold this conference, also known as the Jeju Process, in the Island of Peace.

This year you will discuss some of the most pressing challenges not just to regional security, but also to the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Importantly, you will also discuss how the international community can sharpen the tools at its disposal to these challenges and reduce the risks they pose.

This joint endeavor is taking place for the fifteenth consecutive year, I would like to emphasize the word "consecutive", meaning without interruptions. It is therefore one of the longest continuing annual disarmament conference series that the UN has had with any member state. I hope this tradition will continue in Korea and also on Jeju Island.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Regionally, for over two decades, the nuclear and missile programmes of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea remain as a source of deep concern. It also poses serious challenges to the global non-proliferation regime.
This year alone there have been two nuclear tests and around thirty missiles launch using ballistic technology.

With each test or launch, whether assessed successful or not, we must assume that the DPRK makes technical advances in its relentless pursuit of a deliverable nuclear weapon.

Maintaining international unity is crucial to responding to this challenge.

The DPRK must cease its provocations and return to the path of denuclearization, through sincere dialogue.

Globally, concern is also rising that the growing nexus between weapons of mass destruction, terrorists and emerging weapons technologies.

The twenty-first century has seen the evolution of a vicious breed of non-state actors, which have no regard, zero regard, for human lives. These global purveyors of terror are actively seeking all kinds of weapons of mass destruction.

At the same time, the barriers to the use and acquisition of these weapons are falling, going down. We have seen this in the continued allegations about the use of chemical weapons, or toxic chemicals as weapons in the Middle East.

The breaking of the taboo against chemical weapons serves as notice that the biological taboo could be the next. In 2015, the MERS outbreak, in this country, showed how vulnerable any country is to a dangerous biological pathogen. We can only imagine how much worse a deliberate release could be.

Emerging technologies are driving innovation, economic growth and equitable development in many positive ways. However, this same technology, if misused for malicious purposes, could have devastating consequences. The international community cannot afford to lag behind the technology curve.

Technologies such as unmanned vehicles, aerial or ground, 3D printing, artificial intelligence and cyber technologies can exacerbate the risks of a WMD attack. Their misuse would multiply the consequences and make it easier for non-state actors to conduct sophisticated attacks.

Through “internet of things”, cyber capabilities could cause massive disruption or casualties through attacks on critical infrastructure such as nuclear power plants. The nightmare scenario of man-made nuclear accidents by cyber-attack is becoming increasingly realistic. This region has the highest concentration of nuclear power plants in the world. Preventing such an outcome should be of the highest priority.

Distinguished colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

This conference provides an opportunity to think deeply about how we use the tools we have in a more effective way.
First, sanctions. Security Council sanctions send a united and unequivocal signal from the international community to the target country to cease provocative actions and to fully comply with international obligations.

Aligned with other tools, sanctions become integral elements of peace and security strategies.

Yet sanctions can be only as effective as their implementation. Some States have difficulty in translating sanctions into their national regulatory regimes. Others simply lack the capacity – if not the will – to enforce it within their territories. This is why we need international partnerships for capacity-building.

Capacity-building is also an integral part of the second tool we have, which is preventive measures. For over ten years, UN Security Council resolution 1540 has built such capacity to help prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction to non-State actors.

It has also built partnerships with industry through the so-called “Wiesbaden Process”. I thank the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting an outreach conference for this purpose, this year, for the first time in this region.

However, new methods of manufacturing, financing and communication, as well as changing patterns of global trade that increasingly utilise transhipment hubs.

The 1540 Comprehensive Review, prepared under the excellent stewardship of the 1540 Committee and its Spanish Chair, are due to wrap up its deliberations in December and we hope that the outcome will provide an opportunity to fill these gaps.

Third, export control regimes. The four major export control regimes have made an invaluable contribution to non-proliferation. Like Deputy Minister Choi, I also welcome the participation by the Chairs of those regimes in the Jeju Process because non-State actors have the ability to cross borders and create global networks pose a new challenge to export controls everywhere in the world.

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world is at a crossroads of turbulent times. The challenges I have laid out here are difficult and complex. Global challenges require global solutions and global responses. All stakeholders must work together to steer such global responses. For those responses to be successful, we must bridge our divides and rise above our differences. It will not be easy to reconcile those differences, but it is possible to find common ground, and build mutual trust and confidence.

I would like to recall what Secretary General Ban said five years ago at the beginning of his second term. He emphasized "Together, nothing is impossible". Together, we can build the world safer, more secure and better for all. Together, we can build the future we want.

I wish you fruitful deliberations for the next two days. I thank you so much.