



Keynote speech by High Representative for Disarmament Affairs:

Arms Control Association's Annual Meeting

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, let me say how nice it is to be back in Washington, D.C. I am very much a product of Washington, D.C. – this is where I learned international relations and international politics, at Georgetown, and I always felt at home here.

This was also the city where I learned the critical importance of high quality, honest and open policy discussions. Only with such discussions, like the one we are having today at the Arms Control Association's Annual Meeting, the world community is able to tackle challenges that we are jointly confronted with.

Daryl and the rest of the staff at the Arms Control Association (ACA) have been very generous in helping me come to grips with some of the more arcane elements of my new portfolio, including introducing me to many of you in the room today. Obviously I feel humbled to speak to such an eminent group and I am looking forward to working with all of you in the months and years to come.

Disarmament in the maintenance of international peace and security

We have heard much already today about the serious arms control-related challenges facing the international community. These are not only some of the most important issues affecting disarmament and non-proliferation, but in fact international peace and security more broadly.

The fragile and increasingly volatile international security environment – as a result of regional tensions, emergence of non-state actors with global reach and resurgence of some of the historical animosity – is further undermined by challenges such as the dangerous and provocative activities of the DPRK, the repeated use of chemical weapons in the Middle East,

and a seeming drift backwards into Cold War era positions, including worrying rhetoric about the utility of nuclear weapons.

It is often argued that in such an environment, disarmament and arms control must be shelved until the climate improves – as if they were part of humanitarian diplomacy to try to soften the hard power of realpolitik.

I think this view fails to take into account the historic role disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation have played in the maintenance of international peace and security. As the Arms Control Association has endeavoured to demonstrate, disarmament has always been a critical component in preventing and resolving conflicts, including during the tensions of the Cold War.

Disarmament is integral to any broader political solution to conflicts. Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation provide mechanisms for transparency and to build trust and confidence. They present avenues for dialogue that seeks to find common ground.

In this way, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation instruments enhance security for all of us. In today's complex environment that is something we would do well to remember. And, if I may add, the international community benefited from an important leadership role the United States of America demonstrated in this area at critical moments in the past, which we all hope it will continue to play.

Overall health of the international disarmament regime

Ladies and Gentlemen

The United Nations has a long history with disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. It is one of the pillars upon which the organisation rests. From the first General Assembly

resolution that called for the elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, to the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the UN has been a venue for dialogue, a source of technical knowledge and an honest broker.

Multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation is a web of interlocking agreements and instruments. The well-functioning of each matters greatly to the maintenance of the overall credibility of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Each of these instruments is a brick in the wall of our collective security. Allow one to crumble and it will damage the entire edifice.

In this relation, we are witnessing worrying trends.

Take, for example, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism. Both have been the epitome of objective independent technical professionalism.

Of the many allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons, the technical experts at the OPCW and its FFM have been able to independently confirm 30 such instances. The JIM has been able to identify three instances of the use of chemicals as weapons by the Government of Syria and one instance of the use of chemical weapons by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

This work is crucial to reinforcing the taboo against the use of chemical weapons and bringing to justice the perpetrators of this horrific crime against humanity. It is work that must be safeguarded and vocally supported. It should not be held hostage to political motivations.

In this complex environment we must be able to rely on the advice of scientific and technical professionals, and this is a critical part of the overall credibility of the disarmament regime that we have built over many years.

Other important examples of worrying trends in different parts of the multilateral regime include the near two-decade long stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament, the financial precariousness of important disarmament instruments, and perhaps most worryingly, the erosion of consensus over the path to a world without nuclear weapons, all of which are damaging the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Nuclear disarmament

Against this broader context, let me touch on negotiations on the Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – or more simply: the ‘Ban Treaty’. I appreciate there are different positions on this matter, but the negotiations do reflect the overwhelming interest of the international community – more than 130 countries – in facilitating progress toward nuclear disarmament. It is a historic development as it represents the most significant multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations in over twenty years.

The Ban Treaty is also a product of the frustration many States feel at the slow pace of nuclear disarmament. It is a frustration that has been simmering for years as positions have widened over how best to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons. Bellicose rhetoric, accusations of arms control treaty non-compliance and expensive modernisation campaigns, combined with an absence of progress on long-overdue measures such as a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and a perceived lack of urgency in implementing successive NPT outcome documents have fuelled this frustration.

A world free of nuclear weapons is a vision that has been subscribed to by the United States for seven decades. It has been advocated by some of the most prominent American statesmen and women in order to enhance international and US security. It is, of course, everyone's responsibility. However, if we are to find our way back to common ground, the nuclear-weapon States must show the way. Their sustained commitment to this universally shared goal has undergirded much of our success over the last seven decades.

Russia and the United States, as holders of the two largest nuclear arsenals, have a special responsibility. Strategic dialogue on further bilateral reductions, involving all types of nuclear weapons, could be a stabilising factor between these two partners. It would also have positive impact on the overall international peace and security.

This is particularly important for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The NPT is the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and an essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. It must remain so. It represents near universal common ground and continues to reinforce our collective security.

I am pleased to see the draft Prohibition Convention explicitly recognises these facts, and hope that this will be maintained through the forthcoming negotiations. But, if a Ban Treaty is to become a reality, the future health of the NPT, and of the overall nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime, will require urgent steps towards the implementation of Article VI commitments. It is also critical to keep constructive dialogues between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the NPT's entry into force in 2020 approaches, States Parties have the opportunity to find common ground on ways forward and make this milestone an anniversary to celebrate.

Role of the United Nations

Ladies and Gentlemen

Earlier I mentioned the UN's role as a venue for dialogue, a source of technical knowledge and an honest broker in the fields of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. Let me briefly explain how UN is critical in this field.

First of all, the UN is a forum for united action. The role of the UN Security Council in unanimously condemning and sanctioning the illegal missile and nuclear programmes of the DPRK is a prime example. Differences persist over specific measures to pursue, but the unequivocal condemnation of these brazen acts is a clear signal of unanimity in the belief that weapons of mass destruction pose a threat to regional and global security.

Second, the UN is a forum for inclusive negotiations engaging all stakeholders. This is not to say that other fora do not play a role – regional negotiations produced the valuable nuclear weapon-free zones and bilateral negotiations reduced nuclear arsenals by around 85 per cent in some cases – but only universal forums create universally binding rules and norms.

With this in mind, the UN should be the venue for efforts to bring about other measures to achieve and maintain a nuclear-weapon-free world. These include negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and bringing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force.

Third, the UN is a useful forum for dialogue on new issues of critical importance to us all.

The enduring concerns related to WMD and conventional weapons have been exacerbated by rapid advances in technology. A suite of new issues has emerged that threatens to undermine international stability. Artificial intelligence and cyber security will be vital to humanity's future prosperity, but they could also, if used for malicious purposes, produce global

problems that require global solutions. Likewise, conversations among all stakeholders are required if we are to grapple with game-changing dual-use technology, such as “3D printing”, in ways that minimise risk while not impeding development.

My final point relates to the UN as an honest broker and custodian to protect, safeguard and implement the most fundamental values on which the UN was founded.

In the field of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation, it goes beyond simply reminding ourselves of the norms. We have played the critical role of impartial referee on the implementation of treaties such as the NPT or the CWC. This role that we play, I believe, is a critical one in actually making the world a safer place, and a role that has always enjoyed the full support of the United States.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen

To conclude, let me go back to where I started: Disarmament breeds security. It is not a vague hope or aspiration but must be a concrete contribution to a safer and more secure world. We must remember it is a core component of the mechanisms established at the creation of the United Nations for the maintenance of our collective security.

It is a cause to which we must rededicate all of our efforts. The United Nations looks forward to the continued US leadership, and to working closely with all of you towards our shared goal.

Thank you.