



**Keynote Address to Foreign Policy Association
Nuclear Conference:**

**“Competition Among the Nuclear Powers
and the New Arms Race”**

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Mr Noel Lateef, President, Foreign Policy Association,

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Distinguished guests,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

My sincere thanks to Mr Lateef and the Foreign Policy Association for the invitation to speak today.

At the outset, I want to applaud the Association for its efforts to raise awareness among the public on important foreign policy issues. Such efforts are central to ensuring informed debate, something we need more than ever in the current geopolitical environment.

Likewise, I want to commend the Nobel Peace Prize Forum, and the Norwegian Nobel Institute, for their commitment to the cause of international peace. I had the privilege of attending the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo last year, when it was awarded to the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, one of the driving civil society forces behind the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

That is a goal behind which we – the international community – remain united. However, it is also a goal that has become increasingly difficult to realize.

I have been in my post as High Representative for Disarmament for just over a year. Yet even in the course of that relatively short time, we have witnessed a deteriorating security climate and an eroding respect for the institutions that underpin our collective peace and security.

The world is seeing a return to Cold War style tensions, but in an increasingly multipolar twenty-first century context that is more complicated and unpredictable. Traditional mechanisms for dialogue and communications are being diluted, removing vital brakes on tension and escalation.

Conflicts have become more intractable, protracted and deadly for civilians. Internal conflicts are rarely “internal” – they are integrated into regional tensions, can draw in major powers and involve a variety of non-state actors, including terrorist groups, many of whom are armed with increasingly sophisticated weapons.

The norm against chemical weapons use has been repeatedly violated yet the international community is too divided to adequately respond.

It is an environment in which countries choose weapons over diplomacy, where global military spending is spiraling and where heavy weapons designed for the battlefield are used in cities against civilians.

It is world in which breakthroughs in science and technology are enabling new weapons that could challenge existing laws and conventions.

And, finally, it is a context in which the danger of a nuclear conflict, either by design, accident or miscalculation, is growing.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the global context outlined two weeks ago by the Secretary-General when he announced his new agenda for disarmament, entitled “Securing our Common Future”.

Indeed, this context is precisely why the Secretary-General announced the need for a new disarmament agenda.

It is an agenda that is predicated on a critical premise: that disarmament – from arms control to non-proliferation, prohibitions, restrictions, confidence-building measures and, where necessary, elimination – is an essential component for securing our world and our future.

This agenda is not about utopian ideals. It promotes a clear-eyed understanding of the tangible role disarmament can play in preventing, mitigating and resolving conflict.

It stresses the importance of disarmament in promoting stability and security, and as a tool for ensuring national security, as well as the contribution it makes to upholding the principles of humanity, promoting sustainable development and safeguarding the protection of civilians in conflict.

It seeks to remind UN Member States of the reason why they placed disarmament at the heart of the collective security system articulated in the United Nations Charter.

It is comprehensive, but not, exhaustive. Nor is it meant to substitute for the responsibilities of Member States. Its primary aim is to reinvigorate international disarmament discussions, explore new ideas and create new momentum for joint action.

The agenda does not place weapons into silos, but considers the impact of all types, from hand grenades to nuclear weapons. It is comprehensive in seeking to create a clear and credible vision for sustainable security that serves humanity, draws from the past and builds towards the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For this reason, *Securing Our Common Future* is divided into three distinct but mutually reinforcing priorities: disarmament to save humanity; disarmament to save lives; and disarmament for future generations.

The first, disarmament to save humanity, aims to reduce and eliminate weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical and biological.

This is a mission as old as the UN itself, dating to the very first resolution of the General Assembly.

As nuclear weapons are the subject of today’s conference, I will return to them shortly.

Regarding chemical weapons, in the last four years there have been at least 14 confirmed uses of these odious weapons. Yet, to date, the Security Council has not been able to hold the perpetrators of those attacks accountable.

The use of chemical weapons cannot be allowed to become normal and the Secretary-General has pledged to work with Council members to rebuild unity, and restore leadership, including through the need to establish a new, impartial and independent mechanism to identify those who use them. Impunity cannot be enabled.

Likewise, as developments in science and technology are increasing concerns about the potential use of biological weapons, the Secretary-General is ready to do more to increase the international community's ability uphold and enforce the Biological Weapons Convention.

Because the BWC has no organization or inspectorate, the Secretary-General has offered to assist Member States to establish a core standing capacity to conduct independent investigations of any alleged use of biological weapons, based on the authority given to him under General Assembly resolution 42/37C.

Chemical and biological weapons have been found by the international community to be repugnant and inhumane. Through his new agenda, the Secretary-General will work to ensure they remain banned and never used.

The second priority, disarmament that saves lives, aims to reduce and mitigate the impact of conventional weapons.

There have been some admirable steps to achieve this goal in the past. Anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions have been banned for years; and 2014 saw the entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty that regulates the sale of weapons on humanitarian grounds.

However, the arms trade continues to grow as countries accumulate vast stockpiles, often in some of the most fragile and conflict-prone regions of the globe.

It is civilians who continue to be the victims of the widespread availability of these weapons. This is especially true as armed conflict moves from open fields to cities. Explosive and other heavy weapons cause untold casualties and drive record numbers of people from their homes.

For this reason, the Secretary-General's agenda places the human-being front and center of all efforts. And it is why he will redouble his support to Member States in developing appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies on the use of explosive weapons in urban areas. There are some positive experiences with International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and African Union Mission to Somalia in this regard, upon which we can build our efforts.

The Secretary-General will also launch a new initiative to ensure that the UN system is able to use its full weight to address the challenge of illicit small arms and ammunition at both the national level and across borders. He will dedicate resources within his Peacebuilding Fund to support government action on illicit small arms and light weapons, including collection and destruction, and the development of legal and policy frameworks as part of the broaden sustaining peace efforts.

Moreover, arms regulation will be integrated into broader work aimed at prevention and development. The Secretary-General's agenda outlines clearly how disarmament is relevant to the achievement of the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development from the goals related to peace, justice and strong institutions, to gender equality, and to safer cities.

The third priority, disarmament for future generations, will work to ensure that the same innovations in science and technology that can benefit millions are not weaponized to undermine our security.

As the Secretary-General said, we must be alert to the possibility that technological innovations could open a new battlefield, or start a new arms race.

In his agenda, he has stated categorically, that when it comes to new weapons, and decisions on the use of force, humans must be in control at all times, and he supports the elaboration of new measures, including legally binding arrangements, to ensure this.

Similarly, he will support all efforts to help States meet their responsibility to determine whether any new weapons are compliant with international law, and initiatives to strengthen transparency, oversight and accountability.

Securing our common future recognizes the increasingly widespread impacts of the malicious use of cyber space. Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure could not only have dire humanitarian consequences, but also implications for peace and security.

And while there is consensus that international law, including the UN Charter, applies to cyberspace, there is not about its precise application, and how States may respond to malicious or hostile acts, within the law.

The Secretary-General is committed to using his good offices to prevent conflict resulting from acts committed in cyber space.

To help address the potential challenges posed by innovations in science and technology, the agenda proposes working with scientists, engineers, private sector and industry to encourage responsible innovation and its application for peaceful purposes. Such broader multi-stakeholder coalitions will be central to producing the necessary game-changing solutions to secure our future peace and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Returning to today's theme, the Secretary-General's agenda reaffirms that as nuclear weapons are the only class of weapons with potentially existential consequences, their total elimination must remain our priority.

However, given the title of this conference, it will come as no surprise that as nuclear-weapon States increasingly choose to pursue strategic competition over cooperation, the dangers posed by nuclear weapons are becoming more acute.

The Cold War era was in many ways dangerous, difficult, and a tragic period in our history. But, throughout it, a web of instruments and arrangements helped prevent escalation, maintain communications and reduce nuclear dangers. Disarmament instruments, such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, were instrumental in helping to create the conditions to bring that era to an end.

In the decades since, we have seen monumental gains in nuclear disarmament, under the dedicated leadership of the nuclear-weapon States, most importantly the United States and the Russian Federation.

Unfortunately, in recent times we appear to have not only stalled in our progress in achieving this goal, but are now starting to go backwards.

I share the Secretary-General's concern that the historic arms control agreements of the Cold War era are now threatened as never before, as well as about the absence of any bilateral negotiations between Russia and the United States for further nuclear arms reductions.

Should the New START agreement expire without a successor or extension in 2021, it will be the first time in some fifty years that these two States have neither negotiations underway, nor an agreement in force.

In parallel, all nuclear-weapon States are modernizing their arsenals or developing new weapons systems. Valid questions are being asked about whether we are in the middle of a new arms race based on quality, not quantity, of nuclear weapons.

As the Secretary-General's agenda makes clear, for the sake of our respective national securities and collective security, there can be no delay in seeking further gains in nuclear disarmament.

Verifiable efforts to reduce the dangers posed by nuclear weapons bolster regional and international stability, and promote confidence and trust, helping to facilitate peaceful solutions to seemingly intractable crises.

We are encouraged by the most recent news on the planned meeting in Singapore next week, and we hope to see a positive outcome towards denuclearization and peace.

Perhaps the most current example of the link between disarmament and security are the ongoing efforts to find a path to complete, irreversible and verifiable denuclearization and sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula. Such an outcome would be a boon, not only for the region, but also for international peace and security.

But more broadly, as the agenda outlines, there is a clear need for dialogue and negotiation among all States to discern how best to shore up the historical gains of the past, while charting a path forward to those instruments and agreements that will safeguard us against future threats.

States possessing nuclear weapons should turn away from competition and embrace cooperation and, in doing so, enhance all States' security, including their own.

The Secretary-General's agenda outlines some near to medium term steps for pursuing nuclear disarmament and reducing nuclear dangers.

As a first step, the United States and the Russian Federation could move to extend the New START Treaty by the five years allowed for in its articles, and to commence at the earliest opportunity the dialogue that could lead to further agreements on reductions. They should be

encouraged to, and where possible assisted in, resolving their dispute over the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty.

They should be joined by the other nuclear-weapon States in taking concrete action to reduce current nuclear dangers, including by making reductions in overall stockpiles of all types of nuclear weapons; ensuring the non-use of nuclear weapons; reducing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in military concepts, doctrines and policies; reducing the operational readiness of nuclear-weapon systems; constraining the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons; increasing transparency in nuclear-weapon programmes; and taking measures to build confidence and mutual trust.

Secondly, the nuclear tests conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea have starkly demonstrated that no matter how robust the norm against nuclear testing, and how valuable existing moratoria have proven, they cannot suffice for a legally-binding prohibition.

All States that have not yet done so should join the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty without delay. In the meantime, they should refrain from taking any actions that are detrimental to the objectives and purposes of the CTBT.

Thirdly, and looking to the future, States should consider practical initiatives, such as strengthening and consolidating nuclear-weapon-free zones, limiting strategic nuclear delivery systems, and agreeing on approaches to verify nuclear disarmament.

A long overdue measure is the negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament of a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

Unfortunately, the negative trends I outlined earlier are being exacerbated by deepening divisions between States over how to achieve and maintain a nuclear weapon-free world.

We agree on the destination but the path remains contentious.

In his agenda, the Secretary-General stresses the responsibility of all States, nuclear and non-nuclear, to work together to bridge the gulf that divides them.

Although differences over the pace and scale of disarmament have been brewing for some time, divisions have recently come to be characterized as a choice between humanitarian and security concerns. As the Secretary-General argues, this is a false dichotomy: Human security, national security and global security are indivisible.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has its detractors, including in this room, but it is inarguable that its adoption demonstrated the strong and legitimate international support that exists for a permanent end to the threat posed by nuclear arms.

These same divisions are also sharply on display among States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The NPT is rightfully recognized as not only the load-bearing pillar of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime, but also central to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Its safeguards regime provides assurance of the exclusively peaceful nature of civil nuclear programmes and it is essential to preserving an environment conducive to disarmament.

As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty's signature on 1 July and the Review Conference in 2020, ensuring the NPT's continued health and vitality should be one of our utmost priorities.

As both the Secretary-General and I have consistently repeated, non-proliferation and disarmament are two sides of the same coin. Together, they constitute a reciprocal legal arrangement between the nuclear and non-nuclear states.

Reversal on one side will lead to reversal on the other and we have reasons to fear the risks in relation to the Non-Proliferation Treaty today.

In this context, let me reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal to all states to fully implement all their obligations and commitments made under the NPT and to work to make sure the Treaty remains fit for purpose to tackle the evolving nuclear challenges of our time.

Success in 2020, something I know is paramount for all States parties, will require this as a minimum.

Those States possessing nuclear weapons have a primary responsibility to lead efforts to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, to reduce the dangers posed by nuclear war and to show the way on disarmament and non-proliferation endeavors.

As the Secretary-General has proposed, this must start with meeting their existing obligations, with concrete benchmarks and timelines.

The total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the highest disarmament priority of the United Nations. But our efforts towards this end remain in a state of severe crisis. Reversing the further deterioration of the international security environment requires a return to the mindset where the pursuit of nuclear disarmament is understood as the best means for preserving peace, preventing major inter-State war and maintaining stability in times of turbulence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this, and in all other endeavors to create a safer and more secure world, the Secretary-General and I will provide whatever assistance we can, be it through facilitation of dialogue or acting as an 'honest broker' or provision of capacity-building assistance. We are an instrument of member states and the international community, and we strive to be a useful and effective instrument.

We will work hand-in-hand with Member States, wherever and however possible, to bridge differences and make progress and return to a common vision and path leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

I look forward to working with you all in our joint efforts in *Securing Our Common Future*.

Thank you.