



**Keynote Address by Under-Secretary-General and High Representative
for Disarmament Affairs Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
at the Atlanta Council on International Relations (ACIR)**

“Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament”



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Distinguished members of the ACIR Board

ACIR Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the Atlanta Council on International Relations for inviting me to speak today.

The Council's mission, to promote education and understanding about foreign policy issues facing the United States and the world, could not be more important today. Informed and thoughtful debate is required if we are to address the complex set of challenges and opportunities that comprise the international environment. And having in-depth discussions to find solutions to difficult challenges is something I learned in this country.

It is also a pleasure to be here in Atlanta, a vibrant modern city with an extraordinary history, including as the birthplace of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Junior. I am humbled that his daughter, Dr. Bernice King, CEO of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, is here with us.

One thing that is not so well-known is that, in addition to his crusade for civil rights, Dr. King was also an advocate for nuclear disarmament. As he so rightly said about nuclear weapons in 1959, ““What will be the ultimate value of having established social justice in a context where all people . . . are merely free to face destruction by . . . atomic war?””

So how does the world look today in 2018? Ours is a world, sadly, in which the challenges to international security, national security and human security are growing. And so is the threat of that destruction.

Relationships between great powers are deteriorating, we see a return to Cold War style tensions, but taking place in a global setting that is increasingly multipolar and therefore more complicated and unpredictable.

We are seeing an eroding respect for the framework of institutions developed after the Second World War that have underpinned global security for seven decades. Traditional mechanisms for dialogue and communications are being diluted, possibly removing vital brakes on tension and escalation.

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

We have watched in horror the repeated use of chemical weapons, yet the international community remains too divided to adequately respond.

Countries seem to choose weapons over diplomacy. Global military spending dwarfs the resources applied to peacemaking and keeping, meanwhile heavy weapons designed for the battlefield are being used in cities against civilians.

Revolutionary breakthroughs in science and technology are enabling new weapons, means and methods of warfare that could spark new arms races and challenge existing laws and conventions.

The danger of a nuclear conflict, either by design, accident or miscalculation, is growing.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was this increasingly troubling global environment that was outlined one month ago by Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, when he announced his new agenda for disarmament, entitled “*Securing Our Common Future*”.

Indeed, the growing concerns for our security are precisely why the Secretary-General announced his new disarmament agenda.

The Secretary-General’s agenda is based on an essential premise: that disarmament is central to securing our world and our future. Disarmament is not a utopian or leftist ideal – it has always been an important part of our security.

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is what I want to talk to you about today: the tangible role that disarmament plays in preventing, mitigating and resolving conflict.

The term disarmament means several things. It includes arms control, non-proliferation, outright prohibitions or restrictions, confidence-building measures and, where necessary, elimination.

As outlined in the Secretary-General’s agenda, disarmament is integral to promoting stability and security. It is a tool for ensuring national security, and it is fundamental to upholding the principles of humanity, promoting sustainable development and safeguarding the protection of civilians in conflict.

There is, after all, a reason why UN Member States placed disarmament at the heart of the collective security system that was outlined in the United Nations Charter in 1945. Those visionaries had seen the destructive power of weapons and they did not want the terror of the Second World War to be inflicted on humanity ever again.

The Secretary-General’s agenda is comprehensive, but not exhaustive. It is also not a substitute for UN Member States’ responsibilities. Rather, its primary aim is to reinvigorate international disarmament discussions, explore new ideas and create new momentum for joint action.

Its purpose is to assist Member States 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,

Securing Our Common Future is divided into three distinct but mutually reinforcing priorities: disarmament to save humanity; disarmament that saves lives; and disarmament for future generations.

The first of these, disarmament to save humanity, aims to reduce and eliminate weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical and biological. This will be the focus of my remarks today, so I will come back to it in a moment.

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

Over the past thirty years or so, significant steps have been taken towards this goal, particularly on those weapons whose use is considered to be inhumane. For example, anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions are the subject of global bans; and in 2014 the Arms Trade Treaty was adopted to regulate the sale of weapons on humanitarian grounds.

As armed conflict moves from open fields to urban centers it is civilians who are the victims of massive accumulations of weapons. As armed forces and groups acquire ever more powerful weapons they cause untold casualties, destroy critical infrastructure and drive record numbers of people from their homes.

This is why the Secretary-General's agenda places human-beings at the center of all disarmament efforts. And it is why he has pledged to redouble his support to Member States in developing appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies on the use of explosive weapons in urban populated areas. We already have some positive experiences on which to draw in this regard, including the good work done by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and African Union Mission to Somalia. They reviewed and changed targeting procedures and managed to dramatically reduce civilian casualties.

In his agenda, the Secretary-General also announced his intention to ensure that the full weight of the entire UN system is used to address the challenge of illicit small arms and ammunition, both within national governments and across borders. These are a major driver of conflict, violence and crimes in places like Mali, Central African Republic, western Balkans, or Central America. He has pledged to dedicate resources within his Peacebuilding Fund to support government action, including the collection and destruction of illicit small arms and light weapons, and the development of legal and policy frameworks as part of broader efforts to create sustainable peace, and to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The purpose of the third priority, disarmament for future generations, is to ensure those developments in science and technology that are causing revolutionary economic and social gains are not diverted or misused in ways that threaten international, national or human security.

For example, in his agenda, the Secretary-General has stated categorically that when it comes to new weapons and decisions on the use of force, humans not AI-enabled machines must be in control at all times, and he supports the elaboration of new measures, including legally binding arrangements, to ensure this.

Likewise, he has pledged to support all efforts that will help States meet their responsibility to determine whether any new weapons are compliant with international law, and initiatives to strengthen transparency, oversight and accountability in this regard.

In *Securing Our Common Future*, the Secretary-General highlights the widespread impacts of the malicious use of cyber space and underscores the fact that cyberattacks on critical infrastructure could not only have dire humanitarian consequences, but also implications for peace and security.

While there is consensus that international law, including the UN Charter, applies to cyberspace, there is no agreement about its precise application, and how States may respond to malicious or hostile acts, within the law.

Therefore, the Secretary-General has reiterated his strong commitment to using his good offices to prevent conflict resulting from acts committed in cyber space.

Much of the technology that is transforming our world is being developed by the private sector. To help address the potential challenges posed by these innovations, the Secretary-General's agenda seeks to encourage responsible innovation by scientists, engineers, private sector and industry, and we are starting to work with them in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to return now to the first pillar of the Secretary-General's agenda, disarmament to save humanity – the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

This goal is at the core of the UN's *raison d'être* – it was the purpose of the very first resolution of the General Assembly in 1946 and it remains one of the UN's highest priorities.

The actual use of WMD, in the form of chemical weapons, has shocked the world and yet it is also becoming shockingly common – in the last four years there have been at least 16 confirmed uses of these odious weapons. Additional allegations continue to be raised. Only two weeks ago, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued yet another report from its Fact-Finding Mission confirming that chemical weapons were used on 24 and 25 March 2017, in Latamenah, Syria.

More reports are pending. Sadly, the Security Council – the guarantor of international peace and security – cannot find the necessary unity to identify those responsible for these attacks and hold them accountable.

The use of chemical weapons cannot become normalized. We are extremely worried that the taboo on the use of these weapons has been undermined and that the disarmament and non-proliferation regime has been damaged as a result.

In his new agenda, 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. This is a critical step along the road to accountability.

Impunity for such horrendous crimes cannot be allowed.

When it comes to biological weapons, the need for vigilance is paramount. Rapid developments in the life sciences – including in fields such as genome editing and the convergence of biology and chemistry – are fueling a growing concern that those same technologies may ease the development and use of biological agents.

In light of these concerns, we need to do more to increase the international community's ability to uphold and enforce the Biological Weapons Convention.

As the BWC has no organization or inspectorate, this includes working with Member States to establish a core standing capacity to conduct independent investigations of any alleged use of biological weapons, based on the standing authority given to him by the General Assembly.

And we will work to develop a framework that would ensure a coordinated international response to the use of biological weapons.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the issue of nuclear disarmament remains one of the highest priorities of the United Nations.

Nuclear weapons remain the only category of weapons with potentially existential consequences. The only way to eliminate the risk of any use of a nuclear weapon is the total elimination of them all. A nuclear weapon-free world is a shared goal of the international community, including the United States.

The Secretary-General's agenda is, of course, realistic about the significant challenges to this goal. It analyses that as trust and confidence between nuclear-armed States erode and as geopolitical tensions undermine diplomacy the danger of a nuclear detonation – whether intentional or accidental – is growing.

I do not wish to romanticize the Cold War; it was a dire period in our history that was fraught with danger and the possibility that cold could become nuclear hot in an instant. Nevertheless, the shared understanding of mutually assured destruction did produce a web of instruments and arrangements that helped prevent escalation, facilitated communications and reduced tension. Arms control instruments, such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and the Open Skies Treaty, were instrumental in helping to create

the conditions to bring that era to an end. Leaders in that period were fluent in the language of arms control and disarmament.

The end of the Cold War precipitated an era of monumental and historic gains in nuclear disarmament. Based on the shared notion that a nuclear war could never be won and, therefore, must never be fought, and under the dedicated leadership of the United States and the Russian Federation, the world witnessed massive reductions in nuclear arsenals – up to 85 per cent in the case of the United States. A string of bilateral arms control agreements from SALT to START to New START ensured a continuous process of nuclear disarmament.

Sadly, in recent years that process seems not only to have stalled but is now going backwards.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly stressed his concern that the historic arms control agreements of the Cold War era are now threatened by claims and counter claims of non-compliance. At the same time, there is a complete absence of any bilateral negotiations between Russia and the United States – who remain the holders of 95 percent of the world's some 15,000 nuclear weapons – for further nuclear arms reductions.

Should the New START agreement expire without a successor in 2021, it will be the first time in fifty years that these two States have neither negotiations underway nor an agreement in force for the reductions of their nuclear arsenals.

At the same time, all the nuclear-weapon States are engaged in expensive modernization of their nuclear stockpiles and developing new weapons systems that go well-beyond maintaining the status quo. Valid questions are being asked about whether we are in the middle of a new nuclear arms race based on the quality, not the quantity, of nuclear weapons.

In such an environment, the security of all nations and their people are put in jeopardy – not least those of nuclear-weapon States.

The Secretary-General's agenda makes clear that disarmament does not weaken national security. Quite the opposite – verifiable efforts to reduce the dangers posed by nuclear weapons bolster regional and international stability, and promote the necessary confidence and trust to facilitate peaceful solutions to seemingly intractable crises.

Take, for example, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty – which eliminated an entire category of dangerous and destabilizing nuclear weapons. It was brought into existence by the US, its NATO allies and the Russian Federation at the very height of the Cold War and unquestionably led to a decrease in tension and an increase in confidence. To this day, NATO considers it to be crucial to Euro-Atlantic security.

Perhaps the most visible example right now of the link between disarmament and security are the ongoing efforts to achieve complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization and sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Ongoing diplomacy and dialogue, including the various summit meetings this year, have been important milestones. The road ahead will require cooperation, compromise, patience and persistence. The United Nations stands ready to provide support as agreed by the key parties.

The developments on the Korean Peninsula in 2018 have demonstrated that diplomacy and dialogue can help parties break cycles of escalation related to proliferation concerns.

Regarding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran, the Secretary-General has expressed his deep concern at the United States' withdrawal the JCPOA and has called on other JCPOA participants to abide fully by their respective commitments under the JCPOA and on all other Member States to support this agreement. The deal remains a major achievement in nuclear non-proliferation and diplomacy and has contributed to regional and international peace and security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A world without nuclear weapons remains a universally shared goal, but committed leadership from the nuclear-weapon States is necessary. They have a special responsibility for nuclear disarmament, to which they have legally committed themselves under the Article 6 of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing deepening rifts over how to achieve this goal of a nuclear weapon-free world. This division has recently come to be characterized as a choice between humanitarian and security concerns. We believe this is a false dichotomy: Human security, national security and global security are indivisible.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, negotiated and opened for signature last year, has been heavily criticized by the nuclear-weapon States and their allies. 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. Once it enters into force it will become a part of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation framework, composed of various multilateral, bilateral and even unilateral agreements and instruments.

As the Secretary-General articulates in his agenda, 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.

The heart of this nuclear disarmament framework remains the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Because of its near universality, and binding commitments on non-proliferation and disarmament, 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 should be its States parties' utmost priority.

This will require an understanding that all states' parties must work faithfully to fully implement all their obligations and commitments made under the NPT. Disarmament and non-proliferation are the two sides of the same coin: a reversal in one will result in reversal in the other. We must all work to make sure the Treaty remains fit for purpose to tackle the evolving nuclear challenges of our time.

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.

And there are indeed many concrete things they can do and the agenda suggests some near to medium term steps for pursuing nuclear disarmament and reducing nuclear dangers.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When each country pursues its own security without regard for others we create global insecurity that threatens us all. That is why diplomacy and confidence-building measures are important, in parallel with responsible defense policies.

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 one.

As we have both consistently stated, we are ready to work hand-in-hand with Member States, wherever and however possible, to bridge differences and make progress, to 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.