Remarks at the exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and other high-level officials on the “Current state of affairs in the field of disarmament and arms control”

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Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this exchange with you. As you are undoubtedly aware, this panel is mandated by resolution 58/316, in which the General Assembly decided that each Main Committee should introduce exchanges with senior officials of the Organization “to enable a dynamic and candid exchange with heads of departments and offices, representatives of the Secretary-General and special rapporteurs.”

Since 2004, this exchange has traditionally addressed the topic “current state of affairs in the field of disarmament and arms control,” and has sought to include the heads of international organizations within the UN system in this field. In recent years, we have made various efforts to improve the effectiveness of this panel, including by requesting panelists to focus their remarks on specific topics of relevance to the current work of the Committee.

In an attempt to help meet your initial objective of creating this panel discussion, I have made a suggestion to have discussions with a broad, strategic framing, not from our narrow specific institutional perspectives, but aiming at placing disarmament at the core of our international security discourse as well as analyzing it in relation to substantive areas of work so closely linked to peace and security, such as SDGs, humanitarian principles, development of science and technology.

This year, the Committee is meeting during a particularly difficult moment for the strategic context surrounding disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. The international security environment is in its worst state since the end of the Cold War. Key multilateral bodies remain in stalemate. And where there is consensus to add new urgent challenges to the agenda, progress almost never materializes at the necessary pace.
It was against this backdrop that the Secretary-General launched his Agenda for Disarmament earlier this year, as his own initiative for the United Nations system. Since then, interested entities within the UN system have worked together on developing the implementation plan for this initiative. We made available the preliminary version of this plan on the website of the Office for Disarmament Affairs (www.un.org/disarmament) two weeks ago.

Before I get to the substantive part of my remarks, I will first elaborate briefly on the implementation plan.

We are committed to pursuing the implementation of the Secretary-General’s initiative in the most transparent and innovative manner possible. Toward this end, we have set aside the traditional format of a static narrative report, in favour of a 21st century-style, dynamic and interactive web-based platform.

On the website, you can access dedicated plans for each of the 40 actions contained within the agenda. These contain additional information on their objectives as well as on the specific steps and activities that various UN entities are committed to pursuing. As of today, [38 out of 40 plans] have been published, with a combined total of [114] specific steps and activities.

The status of each of these activities is indicated on the website. These pages will be updated regularly and tracked over the lifetime of the implementation plan. Specific information will be added under each activity as work progresses. New activities will be added, as we move toward the completion of each action.

While there is no overall timeframe for the fulfilment of the agenda as a whole, we envisage that most planned activities will be completed by the end of 2021. At that time, we should be in a position to take stock of the status of the entire agenda.

As a token of our appreciation, we would like to publicly identify on the website those States, regional organizations and other partners that have stepped forward to champion or support various actions. These champions and supporters have committed to financially support, or politically support in a leadership capacity, activities in connection with the agenda. I would like to encourage you to give us feedback on the implementation plan as we are committed to improve it.
Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will devote the remainder of my remarks to the international situation relating to weapons of mass destruction and what entities within the UN system are committed to do to facilitate dialogue and agreed measures to achieve common security for all. In my opening remarks to this session, I spoke of the problems and challenges we face. Now, I will focus on some possible solutions.

Nuclear disarmament rightfully remains the top priority on our agenda. The need for measures to reduce risks posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons is more urgent in a deteriorated security environment. There can be no doubt that shared norms against the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons will continue to strengthen in the years ahead. Yet, without concrete action to implement past commitments, nuclear risks will grow in the face of constant modernization and the erosion of bilateral arrangements.

To restore trust and confidence, all States that possess nuclear weapons should reaffirm that a nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought. Together with UNIDIR, we will work together with all interested States to promote new measures to reduce nuclear risks, enhance stability and increase international security in all available forums. We will also work with the parties to treaties that establish nuclear-weapon-free zones to enhance cooperation between regions and to consolidate the respective regimes.

In the area of other weapons of mass destruction, the still-unanswered challenges to the norm against chemical weapons, coupled with developments in science and technology, have given rise to new concerns about the increasing likelihood of biological warfare. The use of a weaponized biological agent could bring unimaginable devastation and suffering to human populations.

To address this potential threat, we are increasing our capacity and readiness to respond to any use within our existing mandates. We will establish a standing capacity to prepare for and support independent investigations of any alleged use of biological weapons in accordance with General Assembly resolution 42/37 C. As we work to find solutions to the financial situation facing the Biological Weapons Convention, we will also deepen our cooperation with our partners across the UN system to ensure a coordinated international response to any use of biological weapons.
As we strive to solve the lingering challenges of the atomic era, we must remain vigilant against the implications of developments in science and technology, some of which may enable new types of strategic weapons with potentially destabilizing effects.

I have been encouraged by the new momentum toward concrete measures to prevent an arms race in outer space. In partnership with UNIDIR, we will be actively supporting existing processes on the elaboration of new legal arrangements as well as measures to implement transparency and confidence-building measures, including political measures and other norms of responsible behavior. We are also collaborating to study the implications of hypersonic weapons for disarmament, peace and security.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have just surveyed a small number of activities we will be pursuing in the interest of disarmament to save humanity. I look forward to the interventions by the panelists, each of whom will speak to a different theme contained within the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda.

While I have had an opportunity to interact bilaterally with many of you over the past several weeks, I look forward to an open discussion on these issues. I will also count on your support, which will be essential if we are to leverage our institutional capacity to facilitate your search for common solutions. As I have mentioned many times before, we developed the Secretary-General’s Agenda to help create momentum and reinvigorate disarmament, and to support your joint work in this regard.

Thank you.