



**Remarks at the open seminar on “A Practical Approach to Disarmament in
an Increasingly Dangerous World”**

**Hosted by the Institute of International Affairs at the University of Iceland
in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and
the Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland**

**Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**



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Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank the Institute of International Affairs at the University of Iceland, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Office of the Prime Minister of Iceland for convening this event.

This seminar in Reykjavik is taking place 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. We are deeply troubled by the increasing signs of breakdown in bilateral arms control between Russia and the United States, most recently the uncertainty surrounding the fate of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. For more than five decades, strategic arms control between these two countries pushed the world back from the brink of nuclear war, helped to maintain stability and ensured that the transition to the post-Cold War era was peaceful.

Beyond bringing real security to the peoples of those two countries, and all those who would have been caught in the middle of an unwinnable nuclear war, successive rounds nuclear limitations and reductions were steps towards obligations that underpinned the nuclear non-proliferation regime. At the time, the leaders and policy-makers of the two Cold War superpowers well understood the practical value of disarmament. I was a student of international relations in the 1980s – when Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev had their summit here in Reykjavik – I remember being glued to the television.

Today, one of the key points made by all of us is the importance of a “rules-based international order.” Even strategic competition must remain constrained by the rule of law. This principle is more important today than ever. The many near-misses and tragic events of the Cold War demonstrated that the unilateral pursuit of national power as the sole means of security was extremely dangerous in a bipolar world. In our increasingly multipolar era, the collapse of strategic security governance would bring unprecedented risks, which no one country alone could expect to overcome.

Sadly, multilateral security governance frameworks are increasingly under strain. As a result of the paralysis and backward movement in strategic relations among the nuclear-weapon States, key multilateral disarmament 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. In the face of the humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear conflict, non-nuclear-weapon States – in pursuit of their legitimate security interests – have sought to bring new pressure to bear in the form of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

In light of this situation and the challenges we face, it is encouraging to see so many members of the international community rally around the objective of preserving the international rules-based system.

Indeed, many of the fundamental axioms that underpin our national and human security rest on the solid foundations of multilateral customs, norms, agreements, arrangements and institutions. These have brought real security benefits which we all enjoy and often take for granted, extending from the taboo against the use of weapons of mass destruction to the prohibition against making civilians the object of attack.

However, as some of the trends I have highlighted earlier illustrate, we need to constantly reinforce and build out this system to keep pace with new challenges and developments. The need for stronger support to States to advance their efforts to reinforce the rules-based international system for security is the very reason why the Secretary-General decided this year to launch his agenda for disarmament, as his own initiative for the United Nations system.

The first pillar of the agenda is disarmament to save humanity. It focuses on the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as on preventing the emergence of new domains of strategic arms competition. The second pillar, disarmament that saves lives, focuses on the regulation of conventional weapons and the third pillar on partnerships for disarmament.

Since the launch of the Secretary-General's agenda, 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 earlier this month.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Entities within the UN system are committed to the pursuit of concrete actions to facilitate dialogue and agreement on measures to achieve common security for all. I very much appreciate the title of this seminar, which gives me an opportunity to dispel a popular myth about disarmament.

Disarmament is not a naïve and monolithic discipline, despite the popular misconception that falsely equates the removal of arms with insecurity and defenselessness. Rather, it offers policymakers with a strategic set of practical tools that can be applied in the widest variety of situations and contexts. These include measures for elimination, prohibitions, arms control, restrictions, limitation, reductions, non-proliferation, regulation, transparency, confidence-building etcetera.

A practical approach to disarmament is one that makes use of the most appropriate tool to achieve the greatest gain for national, human and collective security. This is why the first act of the General Assembly, when it convened its premier session in 1946, was to seek the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction.

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 really 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 steady 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 the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (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.

And 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. I hope Member States will build on this momentum, pursue every available avenue for progress and give existing tracks for dialogue every opportunity to succeed.

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.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In his opening remarks to the current session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General observed that:

“Our world is suffering from a bad case of “Trust Deficit Disorder”. People are feeling troubled and insecure. Trust is at a breaking point. Trust in national institutions. Trust among states. Trust in the rules-based global order.”

The disarmament toolkit includes many forms of measures specifically designed with the aim of creating mutual understanding and trust, reducing misperceptions and miscalculations, enhancing clarity of intentions, and ultimately reducing the risk of armed conflict.

It is precisely in times such as these that we need to reinvigorate political dialogue and negotiations for disarmament and arms control as the safer, smarter and more effective means for achieving security. In implementing the disarmament agenda, the Secretary-General is committed to redoubling his efforts to facilitate critical discussions among States and, through his own quiet good offices, exploring new approaches and build mutual confidence.

Thank you.