



**Remarks by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
at The Hague campus of Leiden University**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here today. I would like to thank the University of Leiden for inviting me to speak and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands for facilitating this event.

It is very encouraging to see such interest in disarmament and multilateralism from students like yourselves. As with all of the important global issues with which we grapple today – from climate change to the erosion of respect for human rights – in the field of disarmament, it is ultimately your generation that will judge the success or failure of our efforts. And I fear you may judge us harshly.

A period of three decades of relative peace followed the end of the bipolar global competition called the Cold War. We achieved massive reductions in nuclear weapons combined with diminishing roles in national security doctrines. We also had other disarmament milestones such as the prohibition of chemical weapons through the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and its Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), headquartered here in The Hague.

Sadly, the world in which we find ourselves today seems to be headed in the opposite direction – the twenty-first century appears to be headed towards great power competition, possible arms races and the abandonment of hard won international norms. We are witnessing the emergence of an era in which

cooperation is being replaced by competition and where States place their faith in weapons, not diplomacy.

The commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War was a solemn ceremony, a mute but powerful symbol of the sacrifice by the millions who died in conflict. It was also a moment of sober reflection, especially for students of history and international relations like ourselves, about the similarities between the world on the eve of that cataclysmic conflict and the world today: economic, financial and trade difficulties, combined with an increasingly multipolar international landscape. This was then and now the backdrop to increasingly hostile competition between States.

One of the differences between then and now is the multilateral institutions and arrangements we have today – the United Nations chief amongst them. As the Secretary-General said to the Security Council recently, and to the Paris Peace Forum just last week, today’s multilateral institutions “have a proven track record in saving lives, generating economic and social progress and avoiding a third descent into world war.” Without the multilateral system and respect for international rules, we risk a return solely to power relations, reward-sanction mechanisms and a cycle of frozen conflicts. Today, we need a recommitment to multilateralism. We also need to ensure that our multilateral institutions are strong and nimble enough to deal with today’s challenges. Our multilateral institutions must regain the trust and confidence of States and people around the world. Our UN reform efforts are not bureaucratic cost-cutting exercise. They must be seen in this broader picture.

With this goal in mind and against the backdrop of a deteriorating security environment, the United Nations Secretary-General, in May of this year, launched his disarmament agenda “Securing Our Common Future”.

This Agenda is based on a key premise – the historical truth that disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control are vital elements of international peace and security.

Without attempting to be exhaustive, the Secretary-General's Agenda addresses three priority areas: Disarmament to Save Humanity – the elimination of weapons of mass destruction; Disarmament that Save Lives – more strict regulation of conventional weapons; and Disarmament for Future Generations – the emerging challenges of rapid developments in science and technology and their possible impact on peace and security.

In each area, the Secretary-General outlines current disarmament challenges and opportunities. Under each pillar, he proposes and commits to a number of concrete actions to take the agenda forward.

Disarmament that Saves Lives aims to mitigate the humanitarian impact of conventional weapons. To that end, the Secretary-General will redouble his support to Member States in developing appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies in conformity with international law related to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. He will also work to ensure that the UN system is able to address the challenge of illicit small arms and ammunition at the field level.

Disarmament for Future Generations focuses on ensuring that developments in science and technology are not diverted or misused in ways that undermine security. It stresses the importance of responsible innovation and its application and of the need for multi-stakeholder coalitions, including the private sector.

Disarmament to Save Humanity reaffirms the UN's historical commitment to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and to nuclear disarmament as the UN's highest disarmament priority.

As I noted, the last three decades have produced tangible achievements in this field. Unfortunately, that is a trend that seems to be in reverse.

States that possess nuclear weapons are once again using the kind of rhetoric we thought confined to the Cold War. They are all, without exception, modernising their arsenals in ways that increase both their efficacy and lethality. The landmark arms control agreements that helped facilitate the end of the Cold War are being eroded without any vision for what can replace them. The demise of treaties such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty detrimentally affects all of our security.

In the world of diplomacy, rancorous debate precludes real dialogue, much less real progress, on the important WMD disarmament questions facing the world.

Against this background, Secretary-General Guterres and I have pledged to increase our efforts to facilitate dialogue between Member States. It does not matter whether such dialogue takes place in formal or informal settings, as long as it is real and substantive. States and especially nuclear-armed States need to stop talking past one another and start talking to one another in a genuine effort to find common ground and forge agreement on areas that can lead to further progress.

There is an urgent need to reinforce the norms we took for granted in a post-Cold War World. Chief amongst them is the norm against the use of nuclear weapons, which has stood strong for seventy years, but has been dangerously

undermined in recent years. In his agenda, the Secretary-General appeals to those States that possess nuclear weapons to reaffirm, as a first step, the inarguable truth articulated by President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev – that a nuclear war cannot be won and, therefore, must never be fought.

At the same time, in order to reduce the growing dangers of a nuclear detonation, either intentionally or accidentally, the Secretary-General makes clear there is a pressing need for States possessing nuclear weapons to introduce near-term risk mitigation measures to prevent this unthinkable outcome.

Steps that increase transparency and build confidence, with the aim of enhancing stability and increasing security for all, would have a particularly positive impact in today's security environment.

Such steps could include reducing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons, reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines, and re-thinking deployment of destabilizing first strike weapons or so-called "battlefield" nuclear weapons.

Other steps include diplomacy to avoid the risk of backwards movement. An extension of the New START Treaty – currently the only international limitation on the sizes of the nuclear arsenals of the Russian Federation and the United States – would be one important such measure.

Multilateral instruments such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) have provided the bedrock on which to create a safer and more secure world.

The NPT's near universal membership and the "grand bargain" that highlights disarmament and non-proliferation as two sides of the same coin have made the Treaty as a core pillar of global security. The consensual outcome documents of its 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences outline a comprehensive set of measures to make progress towards to total elimination of nuclear weapons.

At its 2020 Review Conference, the NPT will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its entry into force; an important opportunity to take stock of its landmark achievement.

Unfortunately, the worsening climate in multilateral disarmament negotiations means that success at the 2020 Review Conference is under stress. But that is precisely why a success is more necessary than ever before. Such success will require acknowledging and respecting all States' legitimate security interests, including the human security concerns. As always, the key to any successful outcome remains demonstrated progress on existing commitments made under the Treaty.

In the 21st century, one hundred years after large scale and brutally inhumane use of chemical weapons in the First World War, the continuing erosion of the taboo against chemical weapons has had a profoundly damaging impact on disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

This week, the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) are meeting to review its operation over the past five years. Unfortunately, this Review Conference comes at the most challenging juncture in the Convention's history.

When it entered into force, the CWC was intended to formalize the norm against such weapons. It was intended that those States possessing chemical weapons would verifiably disarm themselves, under the auspices of the OPCW; that the re-emergence of chemical weapons would be averted; and that the peaceful uses of chemistry would be facilitated.

Sadly, the world is not yet free of chemical weapons. To the contrary, the past five years have seen the continued use of these weapons in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as in Iraq, Malaysia and the United Kingdom.

The re-emergence of these horrendous weapons has, sadly, been accompanied by a complete absence of accountability for their use. This is a blight on the conscience of the international community. Impunity for the use of these weapons is intolerable.

The Secretary-General has repeatedly called for the international community to act. Sadly, however, the Security Council has not fulfilled its responsibility to bring accountability to the perpetrators of these heinous acts. The closure of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the failure to agree on a successor created a vacuum of accountability. It should not be forgotten that with its great authority, the Security Council also holds a special responsibility: to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security. I can think of fewer greater threats to peace and security than the continued use of any weapon of mass destruction, apparently with impunity.

The OPCW has been steadfast in its efforts to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention. At the same time, the whole of the international community, as well as the Security Council, must fulfill its obligations and confront this shared challenge.

I would be remiss if I did not also touch upon another challenge in the context of weapons of mass destruction – that of biological weapons.

The CWC is approaching universal membership with the support of the OPCW. The Biological Weapons Convention, however, lacks an implementing body that is equivalent to the OPCW. This in spite of the fact that the risk of biological weapons is increasing, with developments in science and technology, which – notwithstanding the enormous benefits they confer – have also lowered the barriers to the acquisition, access to and use of biological weapons.

In his disarmament agenda, the Secretary-General has therefore correctly highlighted the need to strengthen the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention, as well as to ensure that there is overall coordination in the international response to any use of biological weapons. This includes the need for the United Nations to be able to prepare for and support independent investigations of any alleged use of biological weapons. Under the authority which has previously been granted to the Secretary-General by both the General Assembly and the Security Council, we will make sure that capacities are strengthened in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The current state of the international security environment does not make progress on disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control easy. Indeed, there is a real risk that we backslide into the uncertainty and insecurity, something like the one during the Cold War. But that is why we think our work together is more important today. If we work together, we can overcome common threats and seize shared opportunities.

Progress is not impossible. In our complex and rapidly changing world, the United Nations remains the invaluable forum where to strengthen our collective resolve to do more to promote peace and security, and sustainable development.

The Secretary-General's Disarmament Agenda comprehensively attempts to demonstrate how we can safeguard past achievements and take steps forward. The chief challenge now is to ensure the agenda moves from articulation to implementation. As the Secretary-General has noted, the Agenda is meant to serve Member States, and My office and I look forward to working with Member States in this endeavour.

At the beginning of my remarks, I noted that in the decades ahead, you will be the ones to judge the actions of today.

That does not mean, however, you don't have responsibility to help shape those actions today.

Ultimately, it will be up to you to decide what sort of world you want to live in. You have the power of agency and urgency. You have voices, and you came make the world hear your voices.

Young people have been an integral part of campaigns that led to the landmark disarmament agreements of this era, resulting in treaties banning landmines and nuclear weapons.

As the Secretary-General said in his disarmament agenda, the young people is the ultimate force for change.

I look forward to working together to make the world a more safe and secure place for us all.

Thank you.