



**Remarks by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

**Inaugural ceremony of the first Indian Fellowship Programme on  
Disarmament and International Security**

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Shri Vijay Keshav Gokhale, Foreign Secretary,  
Shri J.S. Mukul, Dean of the Foreign Service Institute,  
Shri Indra Mani Pandey, Additional Secretary,  
Dear Fellows,

I am pleased for this opportunity to be with you at this ceremony to inaugurate the first Indian fellowship programme on disarmament and international security. I commend the Government of India for its initiative in establishing this programme. With its focus on junior diplomats from a geographically diverse range of countries, this programme has a close parallel with the United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme, which was established in 1978 by the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Since then, more than 1,000 young women and men, drawn from the vast majority of Member States, have been United Nations disarmament fellows. India has been one of the most active participants in the programme. The subsequent career paths of these fellows stand as an impressive testament both to the value of the training and to the high calibre of individuals selected to participate.

Three Indian fellows went on to serve as the country's ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament. Of those who remain active in the field, one now serves as Deputy Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and another has been recently appointed as Executive Director of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation.

But the value of engaging younger professionals and students in disarmament is not just matter of investing in future potential. The Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament, which he released in May last year, emphasizes the need to empower the young generation as the ultimate force for change.

It is no coincidence that the Secretary-General decided to launch his Agenda at a university, in front of an audience of students. His Agenda recognizes how young people today have a tremendous ability to bring about change in the world. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the field of disarmament.

Young people have worked at the forefront of successful international campaigns to ban landmines, cluster munitions and more recently nuclear weapons. The cut-off age for your programme could not have been more appropriately chosen – every member of the staff of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons was under the age of 35 when it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017.

Youth-led dialogue can offer a wellspring of creativity as we seek to understand possible threats from emerging technologies like cybertools, drones and artificial intelligence. Such creativity will be crucial as we seek to adapt how we pursue disarmament so that our efforts are relevant to other priorities, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, humanitarian action, the prevention and resolution of armed violence and the protection of the environment.

Youth-led political coalitions have amplified the voices of women, who remain significantly underrepresented in intergovernmental disarmament processes. Only by ensuring the full and equal participation of women in all disarmament and international security processes can we apply the fullest range of ideas and talents to effectively address the formidable challenges facing our planet.

Despite the advantages of growing up in a time of global connectedness and economic growth, inequality of all types prevents many young people from entering highly specialized fields, such as disarmament, making it difficult to sustain their interest in disarmament work in the longer-term. Regional disparities in wealth and consequent inequalities can translate into insurmountable barriers for engagement by young peoples, especially from the Global South, in international disarmament meetings, training and networking opportunities.

That is why the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament seeks the establishment of more education and training opportunities, in order to create a platform for the sustainable entry of young people from all parts of the world into this field. Our goal is to increase the availability of tools, training and networks that young people can tap into to address global, regional and local problems where measures for disarmament, demilitarization and the prevention of armed violence can make a difference.

I therefore commend the establishment of the Indian fellowship programme on disarmament and international security for sharing these objectives and designs.

The current situation in the field of disarmament demonstrates a clear need for new energy, new ideas and innovation. The international security environment is in its worst state since the end of the Cold War. Key multilateral bodies remain stalemated. But more troubling, leadership in key States no longer seems to value the tools of disarmament and arms control as an indispensable means for ensuring international stability and national security.

Multilateral security governance frameworks are increasingly under strain. Arms control agreements are being violated and abandoned. Norms against the use of weapons of mass destruction have been defied with impunity. The toll of armed conflict on civilians remains unacceptably high. And our multilateral institutions have struggled to keep pace with implications posed by developments in science and technology.

To address these trends, the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament rests on four pillars.

The first pillar is disarmament to save humanity. It focuses on the elimination of nuclear weapons, stopping the re-emergence of other weapons of mass destruction and preventing the creation of new domains of strategic arms competition.

The second pillar is disarmament that saves lives. It addresses the objectives of mitigating the humanitarian impact of conventional arms as well as the excessive accumulation, insufficient regulation and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

The third pillar is disarmament for future generations. It addresses our need to remain vigilant in our understanding of new and emerging weapon technologies that could imperil peace and stability, result in civilian harm, or strain existing legal frameworks.

The fourth pillar is partnership. I have already spoken about the importance of youth. Achieving meaningful progress in disarmament also requires that we create effective coalitions across the United Nations system, with regional organizations, and with scientists, engineers and the private sector, and civil society.

It is in the last connection that I commend India for launching this fellowship programme. I believe such actions are in line with India's historical role as a vocal champion for global nuclear disarmament. In this period of deteriorating strategic security relations and growing multipolarity, all States that possess nuclear weapons, including India, have a special responsibility to pursue renewed dialogue, to seek reciprocal steps to reduce risks, and to lead efforts to return us to a common vision and path leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Investment in the younger generation clearly contributes to these objectives. In launching his Agenda for Disarmament, the Secretary-General said "young people are the most important force for change in our world. ... I hope you will use your power and your connections to advocate for a peaceful world, free from nuclear weapons, in which weapons are controlled and regulated, and resources are directed towards opportunity and prosperity for all."

I wish you all the best for your studies ahead and in your future endeavours. The United Nations stands ready to work with you, to help you acquire the knowledge and skills to amplify your voices and lead the change we need. We are all counting on your success.

Good luck and thank you.