UNODA United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

Disarmament:
Old Challenges, New Opportunities

By

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I am very grateful to the University of Ottawa's Centre for International Policy Studies for hosting this event, in partnership with Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Throughout the history of global disarmament efforts, scholars have had tremendously important contributions to make in moving this great cause forward.

They have helped to educate the public, to deepen our understanding of disarmament as part of a historic process, to explore how to overcome obstacles encountered, and to identify the many ways that disarmament advances the public interests in achieving a safer and more secure world, while conserving resources for more productive social and economic uses.

We stand now at a rather remarkable juncture when it comes to disarmament. A few years ago, disarmament was widely viewed as a rather minor issue on the agenda of international peace and security. It was often viewed as somewhat of a hold-over issue inherited from the Cold War—rather *passé* and detached from the real security issues of the day.

Yet today one can scarcely pick up a newspaper or monitor news developments on social media without encountering countless stories involving disarmament, non-proliferation, or arms control themes. One day we read of chemical weapons being used in Syria, then its decision to eliminate such weapons. Another day we see that an interim international agreement has been reached to limit Iran's nuclear activities, which may lead to a more permanent resolution of outstanding concerns over its nuclear programme. Yet another day we see the adoption of a multilateral Arms Trade Treaty. All of these occurred this year alone.

Something has happened. The media, the public and their leaders are increasingly recognizing the stakes involved when it comes to public policy issues relating to weapons of mass destruction (the proverbial WMD being nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons), as well as the large-scale production and trade in conventional armaments. There is a strong perception that the risks associated with such weaponry are real—as are their human, economic, and environmental costs.

This is enormously encouraging, especially because this growing awareness has also been accompanied by a rebirth of a perception in academia, in government, and among the public at large, that even the greatest problems posed by such weaponry are susceptible to human solution, through enlightened national policies and cooperative multilateral action.

To be sure, the challenges posed by WMD and by conventional arms are not exactly new. The world has been confronting them for many decades. Even the UN Charter itself—which was signed before nuclear weapons had even been tested—recognized a place for both "disarmament" and "the regulation of armaments" among its important goals. They were intended as means to reinforce other fundamental norms in the Charter—including the prohibition on the threat or use of force, the duty to resolve disputes peacefully, the need to promote social and economic development, and the advancement of justice and the rule of law. Together, these constitute the basic elements of a new system of international peace and security to replace the one left in flames at the end of World War II.

I like to remind people that disarmament and the regulation of armaments are among the

first goals of the United Nations organization and are among the longest sustained activities of General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretariat. The elimination of nuclear weapons and other WMD was identified as a goal in the first resolution of the General Assembly in January 1946. In 1959, the General Assembly placed the issue of "general and complete disarmament" on its agenda—a subject that combined WMD disarmament with conventional arms control as simultaneous pursuits at the United Nations. At its first Special Session on disarmament in 1978, this became the world community's "ultimate objective" in this field.

I am dwelling on this early history because it is useful in helping us to understand what is going on today as we confront some very old disarmament challenges and consider new opportunities for meeting them.

The oldest disarmament challenge unquestionably remains achieving the universal elimination of all WMD, especially nuclear weapons given their unique deadly effects. The newest opportunity to meet this challenge has been the groundswell of support for a humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament, which focuses on the catastrophic effects of such weapons. Essentially, this approach works from the premise that it would be virtually impossible for such weapons to be used without flagrantly violating centuries-old fundamental norms of international humanitarian law.

Some might well ask, what's new about this? After all, we have for decades been hearing the poignant testimonies from the survivors (*hibakusha*) of the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki—we already know rather well what these weapons can do. What is new is the extent that awareness of these effects is starting to have some real impact in terms of public policies of states around the world.

I believe this impact is the result both of some enlightened leadership from some states as well as effective advocacy by groups and individuals in civil society. Starting in January 2007, we saw the first of a series of influential op-eds by former US officials George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn stating the case for nuclear disarmament. In October 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal. Certainly President Obama's important speech at Prague in April 2009 had a profound effect in underscoring the benefits for peace and security of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. A year later, the states parties attending the 2010 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) adopted a consensus final report that expressed its "deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" while reaffirming "the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law."

We are also seeing other distinguished entities—including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Inter-Parliamentary Union—promoting this approach through their publications and resolutions. Even city mayors are joining the cause—the NGO Mayors for Peace now has representatives from over 5,800 cities worldwide. Global religious groups of virtually all denominations are also making their own contributions.

As the composition of the network of groups working for nuclear disarmament continues to diversify and broaden geographically, there will inevitably be new opportunities to move this agenda forward. We are witnessing a convergence of two trends that give me hope for a brighter future in this field. We are seeing a new level of democratic participation by the people in disarmament issues, and we are seeing new recognition of the importance of advancing the rule of law in this field, as seen in strong support for a nuclear weapons convention, entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, negotiation of a fissile material treaty, and persisting efforts to achieve universal membership in the NPT.

Turning to chemical weapons, I would argue that the global taboo on using such weapons has arguably never been more widely recognized, especially after the tragic uses of such weapons in Syria. The decision by Syria to eliminate its chemical arsenal and to join the CWC will have implications well beyond that single country. There are signs that Israel might soon consider joining the treaty as well. And as the taboos on the possession and use of chemical weapons become stronger, this may well help to inspire new progress in establishing a Middle East zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. If there are two "new opportunities" I would really like to see exploited in the field of chemical weapons, the first would be a new wave of efforts to establish a Middle East WMD-free zone, and the second would be to achieve full universal membership in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

As for biological weapons, the twin taboos on possession and use are also near universal—there are already 168 states parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the number continues to grow. The mere fact that no state admits to having such weapons testifies to the strength of this norm. When is the last time you heard a country calling itself a "biological-weapon State" or touting the indispensability of its biological weapons deterrent force? The new opportunities in this field could include additional efforts to achieve universal membership in the BWC and further improvement of the Secretary-General's Mechanism to investigate possible uses of both chemical and biological weapons.

Now, as I have emphasized, the UN is not focused only on eliminating WMD. Our vision—and by "our" I mean the vast majority of our Member States and the Secretariat—is not at all focused on creating a WMD-free world tormented by conventional arms races, conventional wars, and an endless build-up of military capabilities. Let me put it this way: as we build down and eliminate WMD, we must build up and strengthen conventional arms control.

Earlier this year, the General Assembly made history with its landmark adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). This was the culmination of a long journey that began with a simple idea put forth in 1995 by a group of Nobel Peace laureates. That blossomed into a complex consensus-based process, including two diplomatic conferences held within the framework of the United Nations.

Prior to the ATT, there were no global rules governing trade in conventional weapons. The absence of such rules left numerous loopholes that made it easier for weapons and ammunition to flow to conflict areas, to be acquired by pirates, terrorists and other criminal groups, or to reach governments engaging in systematic human rights violations.

We continue to witness widespread human suffering caused by the uncontrolled spread of sophisticated weaponry in conflict regions. Countless news reports cite the plight of civil populations that are being victimized by the misuse of arms by State-armed and security forces, non-State armed groups, and organized criminal groups. These are clear reminders that weapons and ammunition must not continue to be traded without being subject to the highest standards to reduce the risks of their diversion into the illicit market or of their use as tools of repression.

A mere four months since its opening for signature, the ATT already has 115 signatories and 8 States Parties. The Treaty will enter into force 90 days after the deposit of the fiftieth instrument of ratification with the Secretary-General. It is possible the treaty will enter into force by 2015. The UN has been working with States and other partners to promote signatures and ratifications and to set up mechanisms for supporting its implementation once it goes into force.

We should not lose sight of the link between poorly regulated arms transfers and arms trafficking. There is ample evidence that diversion from legitimate stockpiles is one of the major sources of supply to the illicit market. In terms of new opportunities in the field of conventional arms control, the ATT is thus expected to supplement and complement existing global instruments aimed at preventing arms trafficking, such as the UN Firearms Protocol, the UN Programme of Action on small arms, and the International Tracing Instrument.

I really cannot overemphasize the extent that the ATT has generated so much energy and enthusiasm all over the world. This is because it brings hope to millions of people affected by conflicts and armed violence. For us at the UN, the ATT plugs a moral gap in international relations and advances international law. It will also create a safer environment for the UN to deliver humanitarian assistance, to help in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, to promote the rights of women and children, to assist refugees and internally displaced people, to promote the rule of law, and to foster social and economic development.

Now add to this most recent achievement other steps forward in the conventional arms field—especially the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We are also seeing some signs of possible progress with the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, often called the Inhumane Weapons Convention. At their annual meeting this year, the states parties decided to convene in May 2014 a four-day informal Meeting of Experts on emerging technologies relating to lethal autonomous weapons, often called “killer robots”.

What we are witnessing, in short, in many ways resembles a horse race, as rapid developments in certain weapons fields are confronted with new initiatives to develop norms and standards to guide or to prohibit their development and use. We have also seen early signs of interest in addressing the security challenges presented by drones. The Russian Federation and China among others have been trying to promote a treaty to prevent an arms race in outer space. And today, there simply are no multilateral treaties dealing with long-range missiles or other nuclear-weapon delivery systems. This is another old challenge that possessor states and the world community will eventually have to tackle as a new disarmament opportunity.

So far, I have addressed “new opportunities” as though they were limited to specific policy actions. But these opportunities also extend to some structural reforms that are needed as

well. One of the greatest challenges to overcome in the pursuit of a world free of WMD and with effective conventional arms control concerns the need to establish some consistency between solemn international disarmament and arms control commitments on the one hand, and domestic laws, policies, and organizations on the other.

[*]Mesdames, Messieurs,

Ce défi est particulièrement évident dans le domaine des armes nucléaires. De par l'article VI du TNP, les États se sont engagés à entreprendre des négociations de bonne foi sur le désarmement nucléaire. Néanmoins, ces négociations n'ont jamais été entreprises au cours des quarante-trois ans d'existence de ce traité. Le problème est en fait plus grave que la simple absence de telles négociations. Le problème est que les États dotés de l'arme nucléaire ne disposent pas d'agences de désarmement chargées de promouvoir la cause du désarmement, de mener des négociations dans ce but ou de défendre la ratification de ces traités. Il manque toute une infrastructure de lois, de politiques nationales et d'institutions pour mettre en œuvre cette obligation du TNP. En lieu et place d'échéanciers et de stratégies pour parvenir au désarmement nucléaire, le monde est confronté à des plans de modernisation des arsenaux à long terme.

Dans une certaine mesure, le défi structurel est le même lorsque nous considérons le cas des armes classiques. Ainsi, si nous comparons les efforts entrepris pour fabriquer et commercialiser ces armes avec les investissements faits pour promouvoir leur contrôle et leur réduction, nous nous retrouvons face à une problématique similaire à celle que j'évoquais en parlant des armes nucléaires.

Comme par le passé, le Canada a un rôle important à jouer en tant qu'intermédiaire entre

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[*] This is especially clear in the nuclear weapons field. Article VI of the NPT to undertake negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament—yet these have not occurred in the 43 year history of the treaty. The problem is actually worse than merely the lack of such negotiations. The problem is that there are no disarmament agencies in any of the nuclear-weapon States to advocate this cause, conduct such negotiations, or defend the relevant treaties through their ratification process. What's missing is an entire infrastructure of domestic laws, policies and institutions to fulfil this particular NPT obligation. Instead of timetables and plans for achieving disarmament, we have very long-term plans for modernizing the arsenals.

Yet to some extent, this structural challenge exists in the conventional arms control field as well, when we compare the respective levels of effort to produce and market arms versus the investment in organizational infrastructures for curtailing them.

As in the past, Canada has an important role to play as a bridge builder between many competing blocs in the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Its longstanding experience of a broker of divergent views is exactly the diplomatic resource most needed in reaching and expanding agreements among states parties. Its diplomacy can help advocates of disarmament to work with those who emphasize the priority of non-proliferation. It can help to foster a consensus-building process linking large and small countries, rich and poor, and countries ruled by vastly different ideologies and competing goals.

Canadian diplomats have displayed such skills not only at NPT-related events, but in all parts of the UN disarmament machinery, including the General Assembly's First Committee, the UN Disarmament Commission, and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. They participated constructively in the UN General Assembly's recent Open-Ended Working Group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. And they have actively promoted increased transparency as indispensable in achieving global nuclear disarmament.

So I can safely say by way of a conclusion that as the world continues to pursue new opportunities for confronting old disarmament challenges, the people and government of Canada will remain among the leaders in pressing for new progress both in eliminating WMD and in regulating conventional arms. I wish you well in all your pursuits, and assure you that you will have strong support at the United Nations. I am very proud indeed of the common ground on which we stand.

les nombreux blocs en concurrence au sein du régime mondial du désarmement et de la non-prolifération nucléaires. Fort de sa longue expérience d'intermédiaire entre points de vue divergents, le Canada peut contribuer à parvenir à accorder les points vue des États parties au TNP sur la question du désarmement nucléaire, ainsi qu'à approfondir les accords existants. La diplomatie canadienne peut venir en aide aux défenseurs du désarmement nucléaire afin de leur permettre de travailler conjointement avec ceux qui donnent la priorité à la lutte contre la prolifération des armes nucléaires. Votre diplomatie peut promouvoir la recherche de consensus entre les États, petits ou grands, riches ou pauvres, et entre États aux idéologies divergentes ou aux buts contradictoires.

Les diplomates canadiens ont fait preuve d'un tel savoir-faire, non seulement lors d'évènements liés au TNP, mais aussi au sein de la machinerie du désarmement des Nations Unies. En particulier, lors de la Première Commission de l'Assemblée Générale, de la Commission du désarmement des Nations Unies et de la Conférence du désarmement à Genève. Les diplomates de votre pays ont également participé de manière constructive au groupe de travail à composition non limitée chargé d'élaborer des propositions de négociations multilatérales sur le désarmement nucléaire. D'autre part, ils ont activement promu l'accroissement de la transparence comme élément indispensable afin d'atteindre l'objectif d'un désarmement nucléaire global.

Alors que le monde cherche de nouvelles stratégies pour relever les défis persistants du désarmement, je peux donc affirmer que le peuple canadien et son gouvernement feront partie sans aucun doute des leaders œuvrant sans cesse à l'élimination des armes de destruction massive et à la régulation des armes classiques. Je vous assure du soutien continu des Nations Unies dans les projets que votre pays entreprendra, qui, j'en suis sûre, seront couronnés de succès. Je suis extrêmement fière des valeurs fondamentales que nous partageons dans le domaine du désarmement.

Mesdames, Messieurs, je vous remercie.