



**Disarmament and the United Nations:
Old Challenges, New Hopes**

By

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To all our distinguished visitors today, I wish to extend a warm welcome to the United Nations. The UN's Office for Disarmament Affairs has a long record of very productive cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and I am very grateful to its Executive Director in New York, Michèle Auga, for inviting me to speak with you today.

Of course, I am also aware of the deep and longstanding interest of your individual countries and the European Union overall in disarmament and arms control issues, as recently reflected in your strong and successful efforts leading to the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty.

I know that all of you are interested in the proverbial "hot issues" of the day, especially recent developments in Syria. But in order for me to discuss these unfolding events meaningfully, I first need to establish some context. We are not approaching these developments as though they are random events or surprises—rather, we view them as part of an unfolding process with a long history. The lessons learned from that process are helpful both in addressing current concerns and in preparing for the future. Let me explain.

Disarmament and the regulation of armaments are among our oldest goals at the United Nations. They are contained in the Charter and were the subject of several of the earliest resolutions of the General Assembly, including its first resolution in 1946, which addressed the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons "adaptable to mass destruction". Together, WMD elimination and conventional arms control remain our two primary responsibilities.

We do not, however, view disarmament as an end in itself. It is instead an indispensable component of a wider set of norms and institutions designed to establish and maintain international peace and security. These include the Charter norms prohibiting the threat or use of force and the duty to resolve disputes peacefully. They coexist with other Charter goals relating to social and economic development, to the equality of all people, and to the rule of law.

So while disarmament is not our only goal, its fate has profound implications for literally all our other work. Consider the potential impact of a nuclear war, for example, on UN activities across the board. Consider the humanitarian and environmental consequences. Consider the social and economic opportunity costs associated with massive levels of military spending. Consider the impact of the illicit trade in small arms on developing countries suffering from chronic armed conflicts.

Of course, disarmament's impact on the work of the UN is not focused only avoiding disasters, but is also oriented to opening up new options for pursuing a safer and more prosperous world. Disarmament offers the most reliable means to guarantee against any future use of weapons of mass destruction—neither deterrence nor defensive measures can offer such guarantees. Progress in disarmament and limits on conventional arms can also liberate vast financial and technical resources to meet basic human needs in all our societies.

We have long attached such importance to nuclear disarmament because of the unique humanitarian consequences from the use of even one such weapon. They are not called weapons of "mass destruction" for nothing—they are the most indiscriminate weapons on earth and cannot conceivably be used without flagrantly violating longstanding international humanitarian

law and human rights law.

To their credit, our predecessors at the UN—both in the Secretariat and among the delegations—have recognized that WMD disarmament and conventional arms control must proceed simultaneously. Even a world without nuclear weapons will not be secure if national and regional arms races are underway involving conventional arms—the intention of nuclear disarmament is not to herald a new age of conventional wars.

If done consistent with agreed global norms, nuclear disarmament will be accomplished with transparency, verification, irreversibility, universality, and binding commitments. Implementation of these standards, coupled with reductions and limits on conventional arms, will certainly strengthen international peace and security.

It is with this background that we are addressing current challenges. Since Syria is on your minds today, let's start with the current crisis.

In 1987, the General Assembly first granted the Secretary-General authority to investigate alleged uses of chemical or biological weapons. This was to be implemented using a roster of experts and laboratories comprising what is known as the “Secretary-General’s Mechanism”. While the Chemical Weapons Convention later established the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to verify compliance with that treaty, the Mechanism remained relevant for investigating allegations of use by CWC non-parties.

Last March, we received a request from the Syrian Arab Republic to commence an investigation of an alleged use of chemical weapons, and we later received some additional requests from other States concerning other alleged uses. The Secretary-General established a UN Mission headed by Dr. Ake Sellstrom to investigate such allegations. This mission was present in Damascus on 21 August when another alleged use occurred in a local suburb. The mission promptly investigated that claim on 26-29 August and on 16 September it submitted its report, which found that nerve gas had been used on a relative large scale. Pursuant to a framework agreement worked out by the Russian Federation and the United States, Syria agreed in September to eliminate its chemical weapons arsenal and related facilities and materials, as well as to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This is where we are today. The OPCW is at work confirming the declared inventories and preparing for the destruction of relevant munitions, materials, and facilities. If there are any difficulties of non-compliance, the Security Council will deliberate on the agreed responses. I cannot possibly overstate the difficulties of undertaking these responsibilities during an active civil war. The goal is to eliminate this arsenal by mid-2014, an ambitious goal indeed under these circumstances.

While the tragic civil war continues, however, the world has just taken another step toward a world free of chemical weapons. There are now 190 states parties to the CWC, placing it on a par with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in approaching universal membership. The global taboo against the use or even the possession of such weapons has been strengthened. The great challenge ahead now is to achieve a ceasefire and to commence a peaceful transition to a

new governing order in Syria acceptable to all parties to this conflict.

Outside of Syria, efforts have been underway since 1974 to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, and since 1990, a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the region. This was the subject of the Resolution on the Middle East, which was part of the package deal leading to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995—a goal reaffirmed by the NPT parties in 2000 and 2010. The Secretary-General, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and United States have been mandated to convene a conference on establishing such a zone, which may take place later this year or early in 2014. In this initiative, all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their delivery systems would be totally excluded from the region of the Middle East. This is truly a new opportunity for progress in the years ahead, an initiative of potentially enormous implications for peace and security throughout the region.

The UN, however, is not only working on eliminating weapons of mass destruction. Last April, the UN General Assembly adopted the historic Arms Trade Treaty. This Treaty will help in meeting a compelling need to prevent the transfer of arms when they would undermine peace and security or where there is a risk that such arms would be used to commit or facilitate violations of international humanitarian or human rights law. It also seeks to prevent the flow of such arms to governments that systematically misuse them or do not prevent their diversion. Already 113 States have signed this treaty and this number will to grow in the years ahead. This is a welcome development because it will both help in addressing the humanitarian consequences of the unregulated arms trade, while also helping societies to recover from past armed conflicts.

The illicit trade in small arms has been particularly devastating in many developing countries and last month the Security Council adopted its first-ever resolution on this subject. The real challenge here is to ensure that the policies, laws, and practices of states are fully consistent with agreed international standards for regulating this illicit trade. While the primary responsibility for this remains with the States themselves, the international community can help by providing financial and technical assistance in this area. My own Office for Disarmament Affairs is doing what it can to help, especially through the work of our three regional centres in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and the Asia/Pacific.

So my concluding message to you today is less one of despair than one of hope. I recognize that we have enormous challenges that lie ahead and large obstacles of all sorts to overcome. Yet I am also reassured by the stubborn determination of our Member States to make progress in the areas I have just discussed—a determination strengthened by persistent efforts by civil society to contribute constructively to this process. I credit the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung as one of those civil society groups that clearly understands the challenges that lie ahead, as well as the potential that exists for genuine progress.

Thank you all for coming to the United Nations and for showing such interest in the issues of disarmament and conventional arms control. We would welcome your support and encouragement for constructive steps forward in all these areas. We believe strongly here that when disarmament moves forward, the world moves forward. Together, let's continue this journey today.