

The United Nations and the Future of Nuclear Disarmament

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I would first like to thank the Pontifical Academy of Sciences for inviting me here, especially Archbishop Migliore, from the Holy See Representation in New York, and Bishop Sánchez Sorondo for making possible my trip here. Let me also congratulate all the members of the Academy, including of course the President, for recognising the importance of this subject, this subject that has profound implications not just for the future of international peace and security but also, in many ways, for the future of the planet itself. And I am most grateful for the opportunity to come back to the city of Rome, where I served as a junior diplomat in the 1960s and also to the Vatican, because at that time for the first time in my life I came to St Peter's Square, for the dominical blessing by His Holiness the Pope and I entered the revered Basilica and contemplated the paintings on the walls of the Sistine Chapel and other treasures of sacred art and I will never forget that first experience.

As many observers have remarked, one of the most astonishing characteristics of our world today is the growing interdependence of peoples. This is not exactly a new development: after all, the first words of the United Nations Charter are "We, the people of the United Nations", which suggests the fundamental unity of all peoples, even though our individual circumstances may vary widely. I recall the words of Archbishop Migliore last September in the General Debate of the General Assembly, when you said, and I quote, "The more the interdependence of people increases, the more the necessity of the United Nations becomes evident". Such views are very much in line with the statements by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, who has often underscored the important role of the United Nations in addressing challenges that transcend national boundaries and that are common to

all humanity. On 24 October 2008 he stated that, and I quote from him, “a world free of nuclear weapons would be a global public good of the highest order” and this is a giant step, conceptually, because it frames the issues of disarmament and non-proliferation in exactly the same light, the right light. These are not issues that merely serve the foreign policy or the national security interests of some states. The benefits from progress in these fields are shared among states, indeed among all peoples of the United Nations, to use the language of the Charter. Numerous scientific studies have been undertaken that show the humanitarian and environmental consequences of a nuclear war or a nuclear attack, though the memories of nuclear attacks at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I think, have already established those effects quite well in the minds of people everywhere. It is somewhat ironic that our work at the United Nations in nuclear disarmament largely derives from the United Nations Charter which was signed before the world even knew of the existence of nuclear weapons. The Charter did, however, refer both to disarmament and to the regulation of armaments as goals of the new organisation at that time, in 1945. In January 1946 the General Assembly wasted no time in clarifying, in its first resolution, that the disarmament goal pertained to the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons adapted to mass destruction. Soon thereafter, other resolutions identified the additional objectives of limiting and regulating conventional armaments and I view these as mutually reinforcing goals and quite logical to pursue together, since even a world without weapons of mass destruction would still have to deal with securities and threats posed by imbalances in conventional forces, as well as other challenges arising from the development and trade of such weapons.

In short, for over six decades the United Nations has, with remarkable consistency, adhered firmly to these closely related goals of nuclear disarmament and conventional arms control. Together, these goals are known at the United Nations as general and complete disarmament, which has been the United Nations’ ultimate objective ever since the General Assembly’s first special session on disarmament in 1978. The United Nations also assumed many roles in the multilateral effort to prevent the global proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially since the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1970. Today

the United Nations provides the de facto Secretariat of the NPT and serves as its institutional memory, besides giving advice to parties to the NPT when it is requested to do so. This continuity of the United Nations' fundamental goals is also reflected in the views of several Secretaries General over the years, literally all of them. Trygve Lie stressed the compelling need for progress and disarmament, even during the difficult early years of the Cold War. Dag Hammarskjöld called disarmament a hardy perennial at the United Nations, and this was half a century ago. U Thant and Javier Perez de Cuellar focused attention on costs of the nuclear arms race and wasteful military expenditures relative to the abundance of underfunded social and economic needs worldwide: that is the theme of development that we found in our Study Day today. Kurt Waldheim once said that the United Nations cannot hope to function effectively on the basis of the Charter unless there is a major progress in nuclear disarmament. Boutros Boutros-Ghali stressed the importance of peace-building and conflict resolution in the process of disarmament, and Kofi Annan clarified how progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation were mutually reinforcing and both essential in strengthening international peace and security. On 24 October 2008 Ban Ki-moon offered his five-point proposal for achieving global nuclear disarmament which he elaborated into his action plan announced in December 2009. A common theme in his basic approach used to stress the importance of the rule of law. His proposals, for example, include an endorsement of the idea of pursuing a nuclear weapon convention or a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing agreements. The ratification of all protocols in the treaties established nuclear weapon-free zones, the entering into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the negotiation of a treaty to prohibit the production of fissile material for weapons, the consideration of other legal restraints in the fields of conventional arms, missiles and space weapons.

In this brief overview I have, of course, not mentioned the hundreds of General Assembly Resolutions that have been adopted over the last six decades. While they are non-binding, these resolutions have considerable political importance because they help to identify common expectations within the world community about global issues where progress should be made. It is in these resolutions, for example, that we find repeated refer-

ences to specific criteria that should guide the negotiation of disarmament agreements, criteria such as transparency, irreversibility, verification and, of course, binding legal commitments. I am sure that when the United States and the Russian Federation finally conclude their bilateral negotiation on a replacement for the START Treaty, which may be quite soon, many in the world community will be closely examining the new treaty in the light of these widely agreed criteria. This only shows the importance and relevance of the work of the General Assembly whose deliberations and resolutions provide a common forum for the articulation of global norms and for some accountability in assessing the behaviour of States in relation to these norms. The Security Council has also made its own contributions, most notably in the field of non proliferation. In the early years of the United Nations it served as the host of United Nations Commissions on atomic energy and on the regulation of conventional armaments. In 1992 the Council met for the first time at the level of Heads of State and Government and issued a presidential statement that declared the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to be a threat to international peace and security. In 2004 the Council adopted Resolution 1540, which required all states to adopt domestic laws and regulations to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their acquisition by non-state actors and finally, last September, the Council held its first historic summit to address the issue of nuclear disarmament and at that even the Council adopted Resolution 1887, which addressed the importance of progress in both disarmament and non proliferation.

Nobody, of course, believes that this will be the Council's last word on disarmament. I expect member states will be encouraging the Council to address this issue again in coming years, which would be fully in accordance with the mandate of the Council after the Charter, to address disarmament and deregulation of the armaments and this is in Article 47 of the Charter. The current president of the General Assembly is organising a thematic debate to be held next month which will enable international experts and member states to address global challenges in the field of disarmament, non proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Yet, despite all these efforts, despite the remarkable continuity of purpose among United Nations member states, despite all the enlightened speeches and resolutions, despite all the studies and reports of

expert groups and despite all the countless initiatives from civil society, the world still faces the harsh reality of the continued existence of reportedly over 20,000 nuclear weapons and the perpetuation and spread of the contagious doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Nobody knows exactly how many such weapons still exist, because there is little transparency and no international verification of the declared reductions. In addition, we continue to hear claims that additional states are, or may be, seeking nuclear weapons while others are allegedly pursuing the technical means to keep the option open of acquiring such weapons. Countries that possess nuclear weapons continue to justify the indefinite maintenance of their arsenals as essential to their security and to the security of those that are covered by defence agreements with them, commonly referred to as the nuclear umbrella. At the same time they seek to impose additional restrictions on the peaceful nuclear activities of non-nuclear-weapon states as a necessary means of containing proliferation and then there is the legitimate concern over the nightmare that terrorists might one day acquire nuclear weapons. If this were not troubling enough, there is a growing crisis of confidence in our role today that the favourite old reliable tools for dealing with these challenges are simply not up to the issues at hand. The nuclear black market, popularised but by no means originated by the intercontinental network of Dr A.Q. Khan, has exposed the significant limitation of export controls to solve the proliferation threat. The discovery of a large nuclear weapons programme in Iraq after 1991 was another blow, showing the limitations both of the international safeguards system and national intelligence capabilities and Iraq was, at the time, a non-nuclear-weapon state party to the NPT. Iraq pursued its weapon programme, moreover, after Israel's pre-emptive strike on Iraq's reactor in 1981, thereby illustrating the limitations of trying to solve proliferation threats by military means.

Libya also pursued nuclear weapons while being an NPT party and then there is the case of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which joined the treaty, announced its departure from it, declared its possession of nuclear weapons and conducted two nuclear tests. Meanwhile, the doctrine of extended nuclear deterrence often associated with the nuclear umbrella has expanded its scope with the enlargement of NATO. Long-range missile tests are ongoing without any legal limita-

tions in several regions of the world. There is no longer any prohibition in the development, deployment or transfer of anti-ballistic missile technology following the abrogation of the ABM Treaty.

Last year the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that global military expenditures were well over 1.4 trillion dollars and yet the world is as insecure as ever while arms budgets continue to rise. In a message delivered to the Global Zero meeting in Paris last week, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated that every dollar spent on weapons is one less spent on schools, lifesaving medicine or research into life-affirming technologies and this reflects the United Nations' longstanding commitment in pursuing disarmament and development together.

So in sum, all the familiar old tools for containing the nuclear threat, export controls, intelligence, pre-emption, deterrence, missile defence and burgeoning defence expenditures are either not working or are widely viewed as insufficient. The world is more aware than ever of the hazards of relying exclusively on those approaches to peace and security. Now this I believe explains, or perhaps helps to explain, why disarmament is enjoying somewhat of a renaissance these days. About the only tool not seriously tried for eliminating nuclear threats has been the elimination of the very objects that pose such threats, namely, the weapons themselves. Disarmament, which has for so long been ridiculed as utopian and impractical, turns out to be one of the most cogent, realistic and effective responses to this global threat. Part of the explanation for this relates to the fact that disarmament, over the years, has come to be understood as involving much more than simply the instant disappearance of a class of weapons. Usually, measures in this regard have involved weapons considered obsolete or of no real efficacy in real combat situations. Serious disarmament initiatives, by contrast, have tended to be those that incorporate multilateral standards long under development at the United Nations, including the ones I mentioned earlier: transparency, verification, irreversibility and bindingness. Nuclear disarmament also has the great advantage of legitimacy, which derives from its pursuit of a universal norm that is indisputably fair and just. It rests on a prohibition that is fully global in scope, without any contrived attempt to sustain indefinitely a discriminatory system of haves and have-nots.

This brings me to the NPT, a treaty that has often been criticised as epitomising this type of discriminatory system and indeed I would have to agree that if the true *raison d'être* of the treaty is simply to freeze indefinitely the number of states with nuclear weapons, then its future would be dark indeed. Yet, I view such criticisms not as suggesting a fatal flaw in the treaty, but as a reminder of the need for states parties to work for full compliance with all the respective obligations under that treaty, including those dealing with negotiations on nuclear disarmament, along with the other commitments adopted by consensus at previous review conferences. This is surely the best way to ensure the efficacy and longevity of the non-proliferation regime instituted by the NPT.

Thus, when states parties to the NPT gather next May for the next Review Conference, I know some issues will be the source of disagreement among the states parties. Opinions will differ, for example, on several key issues, including the extent to which states parties have or have not fulfilled each of the three key commitments under the treaty relating to non proliferation, disarmament and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Many non-nuclear-weapon states will argue that there has not been enough disarmament and too much interference with peaceful uses of nuclear energy and too intrusive burdens imposed upon them in the name of non proliferation. The nuclear-weapon states and some of their allies will describe all they have done to fulfil their disarmament commitments and stress how restraints on peaceful uses of nuclear energy and strengthened safeguards will be essential for there to be further progress in disarmament.

And another group of states consisting largely, but not exclusively, of Arab states and Iran will call for immediate efforts to implement the resolution on the Middle East which was part of the package deal that led to the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, a resolution that dealt with the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in that region. If the states parties adopt flexible positions and refuse reasonable compromises there will, of course, be a genuine danger that this conference will result in another stalemate, as did the previous Review Conference in 2005. Yet, if that happens, the failure will not be found in the Treaty or in the organisation of the conference: the responsibility will rest solely with the states parties themselves. This unfortunate result is by no

means a certainty, because there are many factors at work now that may be moving the future of this conference and the Treaty itself in a more positive direction. Judging from their recent statements and related initiatives I believe that the leaders of the nuclear-weapon states now understand quite well the depth and breadth of international expectations for further progress in nuclear disarmament. The conclusion of a new START treaty, coupled with an agreement to start negotiations on additional strategic arms reduction, involving verified dismantlement, would help enormously in setting the favourable mood for the conference deliberations. I also believe that, if the growing block of states known as middle powers, from both north and south, are able to remain together in solidarity, especially on the use of nuclear disarmament, this too will help in the consensus-building process. I also hope to see a significant presence of civil society at this Review Conference, for it is vital for the public both to observe and to contribute to this review process. A combination of these political forces operating from the top down, bottom up and outside in can help to overcome the last and perhaps the most daunting obstacle to progress, namely the lack of political will.

I certainly cannot predict the outcome of the NPT Review Conference but I do believe that the United Nations will continue to make important contributions in shaping the future of nuclear disarmament. We, and by this I mean the Secretariat and the member states working together at the United Nations disarmament machinery, we will do this together and we will do all we can to promote further progress in eliminating all weapons of mass destruction and in limiting and regulating conventional arms, consistent with our ultimate objective of general and complete disarmament. We will work to develop and to strengthen the multilateral norms in these fields and to work to make them legally binding. We will continue to provide our member states with a central global arena for deliberating these issues and a forum for the representation of views of civil society. We will continue our work in advocacy and efforts to promote disarmament and non-proliferation education. I wish once again to thank the Pontifical Academy of Sciences for demonstrating its sincere interest in the issues now before us. May this Study Day take us another step forward on our common journey to a world without nuclear weapons. Thank you.