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Statement before the First Committee of the 60th General Assembly
19 October 2005

The Implementation of Resolutions:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I would like to thank the Chairman for inviting me to speak on a very important issue which goes to the heart of the effectiveness of the work of this Committee – namely the implementation of its resolutions. While this is not a new concern and some of you will have heard similar statements in previous years, the issue has taken on a new significance in 2005 in light of the recommendations in the Outcome Document of the World Summit, and in particular the section dealing with the Secretariat and the planned review of all mandates older than five years. I will come back to this and its implications later in more detail.

But first you will recall that following the conclusion of the 59th Session of the General Assembly, Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba, as the Chairman of the First Committee, circulated a letter to Member States in which he identified the actions that could improve the future work of the Committee. Among those actions, he recommended that the Secretariat prepare a table listing all reports requested by the resolutions adopted during the 59th Session that would require inputs from Member States for the compilation of views and information on specific subjects and, where feasible, explore the creation of a specific format or template to facilitate the preparation of such inputs. He also recommended that a more analytical approach to the reports be adopted and that all reports be made available electronically.
When I addressed the Committee last year, at the invitation of Ambassador de Alba, on this same subject, I noted that the First Committee annually adopted over fifty resolutions and decisions addressing the full range of issues in the field of international peace and security. Deriving from these resolutions were some 30 requests for reports to be submitted to the General Assembly each year. As a part of the Secretariat's efforts to rationalize its work, DDA had succeeded in consolidating reports on similar issues, bringing down the number of reports submitted to the current session of the General Assembly to 23. Of these 23 reports, six required substantive inputs from the Department. These include follow-up on the implementation of recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts on Disarmament and Development, and reporting on the activities of disarmament bodies and programmes, that is to say, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, the Regional Centres in Africa, in Asia and the Pacific, and in Latin America and the Caribbean. A total of 12 reports contained the views of individual Member States on specific issues, as requested by the relevant resolutions.

In response to requests from the General Assembly for the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on various disarmament-related issues, the Department is annually responsible for sending appropriate Notes Verbales reminding Member States of the decisions taken by the General Assembly and setting deadlines for the provision of information. Unless specifically requested, the Department has no mandate to evaluate such views of Member States in preparing these reports, nor to undertake substantive analysis of these views to assess the implementation of specific disarmament initiatives. The only format or template endorsed by Member States for the preparation of their inputs to reports is that for the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and the United Nations Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures. It should be noted that all reports, when issued, are available electronically in all six official languages on the website of the General Assembly under the heading "Documentation".

In compliance with the request of the General Assembly to produce shorter and more concise reports, the Department has made special efforts to bring the report on measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction within the page-limit requirement.
by including only the new developments following the reporting on the subject at the 59th Session and by summarizing the inputs of international and regional organizations, while reproducing in full the responses of Member States.

As originally recommended by Ambassador de Alba, the Department for Disarmament Affairs has prepared a table listing all reports requested by the resolutions adopted during the 59th Session that required inputs from Member States for the compilation of views and information on specific subjects. The Department has also prepared a separate table showing those reports that require its own substantive inputs. These tables are now being circulated to the Committee.

The first—and most general—conclusion from a review of these 12 reports is that relatively few Member States responded to the Secretary-General's requests for their views. Even with respect to the report with the greatest number of responses—relating to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms—some 48% of Member States did not reply. Two reports—dealing with conventional arms control at the regional and sub-regional levels and on strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region—had only three responses out of 191 Member States.

I must also point out that in some cases even the main sponsors of the resolutions requesting these reports did not respond to the Secretary-General's requests for their views. Five reports did not contain the views of any of their main sponsors, while another five reports each had less than ten replies from their sponsors. The record for the 59th Session showed a similar overall pattern, but I do not believe that to be something from which to draw much comfort.

The report on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms contained the most replies, a total of 107 Member States. The resolution with the second highest number of responses dealt with "objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures" and had 69 replies; however, even here some 63% of the Member States did not come forward with their views. This low level of response clearly undercuts the ability of these reports to provide a wide-ranging representation of the views and information from Member States.
I must add one qualifier. These general statistics refer to views provided by individual Member States, and not to reports submitted on behalf of regional groups of States. Only two reports, however, contained such an bloc reporting of views—the reports respectively on “observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control” and on “promotion of multilateralism in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation”. Therefore, the overall finding about the limited number of replies remains valid. I note also that, compared to the 59th Session, the frequency, or the number, of reporting at the 60th Session reflects a similar overall pattern except in the case of two reports. The first of these, on “conventional arms at the regional and sub-regional levels” received only three responses at the current 60th Session compared to 12 responses at the 59th Session. The second deals with “strengthening of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region”, which received just three responses at the current session compared to seven at the previous session.

I should like to make clear that these figures do not in any way call into question the substantive merits of the individual resolutions generating the requests for reports. They do, however, suggest either a need for Member States to examine more carefully the frequency of reporting or to increase their responsiveness to the Secretary-General’s requests for their views.

In this respect, I would like to draw your attention to the specific section of the World Summit Outcome Document dealing with the Secretariat and the planned review of all mandates older than five years. Member States are seeking the Secretary-General’s analysis and recommendations to facilitate this review, including identification of opportunities for programmatic shifts to be considered by the Assembly in the first quarter of 2006. As a first step, the Secretary-General has asked each Department or Office to prepare a careful inventory of all existing mandates, including a review of all resolutions, decisions or instructions, along with suggestions for consolidation, discontinuance and streamlining.

The importance of broadening participation in the submission of national reports should not therefore be underestimated. There can be no “results-based” analysis of these resolutions
without facts about their implementation. Reports are an essential means for Member States to signal to other Member States and to civil society what they are doing on behalf of the goals of the many resolutions and decisions adopted each year by this Committee. They provide the feedback needed to assess progress in achieving the solemn goals of these resolutions, and to modify such resolutions as needed to focus them on more precise objectives. This applies regardless of the issue - whether it concerns efforts to curb the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, to promote controls over other conventional arms, to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, to pursue nuclear disarmament, to promote multilateralism, to enhance transparency, or to advance any other worthy goals of these resolutions. The review of all mandates requested by the Summit will indeed provide an opportunity to modify the resolutions focusing them on more precise objectives and to improve their implementation.

In my opening statement to this Committee on 3 October, I placed emphasis on the need for ensuring the Committee’s continued relevance to the world outside this room and on the importance of practical measures to help pick up the pieces following the successive disappointments of the NPT Review Conference and the World Summit. I believe that through improved implementation and reporting of our own resolutions we would be making a very necessary first step.

Thank you.