Madam Chairman,

This week has shown again that nuclear weapons in irresponsible hands are the single greatest threat to humanity.

Conducting a nuclear test in present-day circumstances was a huge, deliberate provocation which has rightly been condemned from all sides.

There is no justification for it. But we could ask ourselves what lesson to draw from this development.

Any analysis could start with the words of last year’s High-level Panel Report to the Secretary-General on Threats, Challenges and Change. It stated, and I quote:

“Many people believe that what passes for collective security today is simply a system for protecting the rich and powerful. Such perceptions pose a fundamental challenge to building collective security today. Stated baldly, without mutual recognition of threats there can be no collective security. Self-help will rule, mistrust will predominate and cooperation for long-term mutual gain will elude us.”

A couple of days ago, we have seen one of the worst examples of self-help. And it is not unique: analysts now point to what is sometimes called the danger of a cascade of proliferation.

The U.N. report I just quoted from, stresses that perceptions matter. Secretary-General Kofi Annan himself has elaborated on this important issue in his reply “In Larger Freedom”, stating, and I quote:
“Depending on wealth, geography and power, we perceive different threats as the most pressing. But the truth is we cannot afford to choose. Collective security today depends on accepting that the threats which each region of the world perceives as most urgent are in fact equally so for all.”

Irresponsible behaviour cannot be eliminated from the world. But we must do our utmost to minimize it. In particular when weapons of mass destructions are involved.

What are the actions we can take?

First, upholding the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty remains of vital importance. If its balanced commitments start to unravel, global security will plummet.

All elements of the NPT bargain are equally crucial.
- Proliferation in any form is unacceptable.
- Cooperation on the peaceful transfer of technology remains a confidence building measure as well as an obligation.
- And nuclear weapon states have to disarm. As Canadian Senator Douglas Roche, initiator of the Middle Powers Initiative, has said: “[Nuclear] deterrence as a permanent policy is not morally acceptable.”

Second, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty must enter into force. We will need now a renewed vigour to that effect. It offers an essential safeguard against proliferation. The Netherlands will continue to support actively the Special Representative for promoting ratification of the CTBT, Ambassador Jaap Ramaker.

And third, a breakthrough in the Conference on Disarmament is now imperative. We must acknowledge that a number of issues on its agenda are to be further prioritized, recognizing their relative weight as was confirmed in the focused, structured debates held this year in the CD.

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