STATEMENT TO THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and other high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament

By

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Our panel today will consist of an exchange between my distinguished colleagues—Mr. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament (CD); Mrs. Grace Asirwatham, the Deputy Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); and Mr. Geoffrey Shaw, Representative of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the United Nations. We will also have a video message from Mr. Tibor Tóth, Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

In my opening remarks to the First Committee on 9 October, I took note of the many challenges ahead in achieving disarmament goals and made an appeal to all delegations to continue their efforts to pursue their common interests in this field.

Few understand the importance of persistence more than the members of our panel, who represent organizations that are deeply committed to fulfilling their own global mandates. All are committed to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. And all appreciate that the achievement of this goal will require legally binding commitments that are verifiable and irreversible, applicable to all nations and implemented transparently.

While we are all kindred spirits on this panel, our partnership is built on deeds, not words alone.

Cooperation between the UN and the CTBTO is close. On 6 September this year, the UN observed the International Day against Nuclear Tests, an annual event used to promote the entry into force of the CTBT. On 27 September, the UN hosted the Sixth Ministerial Meeting on the CTBT and on the same day many of us here attended a special performance of the play “Reykjavík” arranged by the CTBTO.

The UN is also working closely with the OPCW in many areas, including assisting in areas related to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540 and promoting universal membership in the Chemical Weapons Convention. On 1 October, the Secretary-General addressed a High-Level Meeting at the UN to mark the 15th anniversary of the OPCW and the Convention, where he stressed the humanitarian implications from the use of such weapons.
With respect to the CD, while it is an independent entity in the UN disarmament machinery, it does report to the General Assembly and its Secretary-General is appointed by the UN Secretary-General. Efforts have long been underway in this Committee, most notably last year, to explore ways to overcome the stalemate in multilateral disarmament negotiations that persists in the CD.

As for the IAEA, it has a wide range of mandates including in the fields of verification and providing technical assistance. In addition, the international community has affirmed that the IAEA has essential responsibility and a key role in strengthening the international nuclear security framework. The United Nations and the IAEA also cooperate closely in assisting in the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540(2004) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

In a very real sense, what we have represented on this panel is not just a group of international organizations. Together, we are also representing international organization as a process—a process of different institutions composed of Member States working together for common causes.

Unfortunately, the particular common causes shared by our organizations are without question some of the most difficult to pursue in strengthening international peace and security. Eliminating the world’s most indiscriminate weaponry requires overcoming monumental political, technical, and institutional challenges, which takes time and persistent effort.

Yet while weapons technologies have evolved considerably over the years, many of the organizational challenges we face today resemble those faced by our predecessors in earlier institutions.

The disarmament official who was my equivalent in the Secretariat of the League of Nations was Salvador de Madariaga. In his book on the subject published in 1929, he concluded:

> The solution to the problem of disarmament cannot be found within the problem itself, but outside it. In fact, the problem of disarmament is not the problem of disarmament. It really is the problem of the organization of the World Community.¹

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This offers a very thought-provoking context for our deliberations on this panel, because the effectiveness of the work of each of our organizations depends very much upon the harmony of policies and priorities of our Member States. Some have called this “political will” and it is the source of all productive work in each of our organizations. Its presence or absence is apparent in the deliberations and votes in the First Committee, along with the work undertaken elsewhere in the UN disarmament machinery. And its presence or absence will shape not just the work of our organizations. It will also shape the future of international peace and security.

I welcome the support that Member States have provided to all the organizations represented on this panel today. This continuing support is enabling each of us to perform our official mandates. To the extent we are successful, we will all be contributing, each in our own way, to the construction of that great larger project described by Madariaga—the goal of establishing a true World Community, still very much a work in progress.