

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



**Statement by
Ambassador Hjálmar W. Hannesson
Permanent Representative of Iceland
to the United Nations**

at the

**General Debate of the First Committee of the
Fifty-eight Session of the United Nations
General Assembly**

New York, October 2003

Mr Chairman,

First of all, Mr. Chairman, may I congratulate you on your appointment as chair of the First Committee. My tributes also go to the other Members of the Bureau. My delegation looks forward to working constructively with you.

We all recall the words of Secretary General Kofi Annan in the general debate that "we must not shy away from questions about the adequacy, and effectiveness, of the rules and instruments at our disposal".

The Secretary General in his agenda for change specifically pointed to such problems as the need to further rationalize the General Assembly and the problem of overlapping items. He also mentioned the energy which goes into the negotiation of resolutions of limited scope and policy impact.

This important committee should be no exception in the examination Secretary General Annan encourages the member states of the United Nations to undertake.

My delegation welcomes your intention, Mr. Chairman, to organize consultations during this session on the organization and working methods of the First Committee. Iceland also welcomes initiatives and proposals which have been submitted by member states on this issue. We must look closely at ways of improving the tools at our disposal. We should consider reduction of agenda items and resolutions and more focused thematic debate on strengthening the multilateral approach to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. Failure to streamline the work of this important Committee, and indeed the Organization as a whole, in a timely manner risks its marginalization in our fast moving and dynamic security environment.

Mr. Chairman

A key element in the multilateral effort to slow down the terrifying expansion of weapons of mass destruction is NPT, the Non-proliferation Treaty.

Iceland would like to congratulate Cuba and Timor-Leste on becoming parties to the Treaty and thus further strengthening its multilateral credentials. We would at the same time like to add our voice to those who have called on India and Pakistan to meet all the requirements set out in United Nations Security Council resolution 1172 (1998).

The encouraging elements in the discussions at the Preparatory Committee this spring, for the 2005 review, was the considerable extent of agreement among member states on the importance of full compliance by all states with the NPT. Key to this is transparency and the willingness of states which have nuclear capabilities to take action to allay concerns of other states, where they arise. Therefore, Iceland aligns itself with those who

have expressed concern over the decision of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to revoke the NPT and to restart its nuclear program in order to produce nuclear weapons. In this same context we encourage the Iranian authorities to fully comply with International Atomic Energy Authority's requirements for transparency in the development of their nuclear program.

Iceland also supports PSI, the Proliferation Security Initiative as a practical approach to counter the growing challenge posed by proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Effective measures are urgently needed in place where they matter.

The risk of major environmental damage from possible nuclear dumping is of particular concern to Icelanders, an island nation basing much of its livelihood on the living resources of the sea. We reiterate the importance of United Nations General Assembly resolution 56/24 L of 29 November 2001 on the prohibition of the dumping of radioactive wastes. This item is in fact again included in this year's agenda of the First Committee. It is not enough to avoid the destruction inflicted by nuclear war, vitally important as that is, – we must also ensure that appropriate measures are taken to prevent any dumping of nuclear or radioactive wastes which gradually and through carelessness or criminal activity would wreak terrible destruction in their own way on the world in which we all live.

CTBT, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a vital link in the network of treaties which aim at arresting and reducing the development, manufacture and potential use of weapons of mass destruction. Iceland would like to encourage all Annex 2 states to ratify this important Treaty.

Nuclear weapons are obviously not the only weapons of mass destruction which are a threat. Indeed, biological and chemical weapons are in some ways a greater risk as they are possibly more easily manageable for terrorist groups. It is therefore encouraging, given the problems encountered last year, that a first Meeting of Experts from States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) was held this August.

On small arms, we support the proposal of the UN Group of Experts to establish an open-ended working group to develop a legally binding instrument on the identification and tracing of small arms. There is still much preparatory work to be done, not least the elaboration of a UN definition of small arms.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, with reference to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, we deplore the ongoing stalemate. Substantive work should be revived from the outset in 2004 and must have a pragmatic focus.

Thank you Mr Chairman.