

Malaysia

Permanent Mission to the United Nations



STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

AT

THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE

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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your assumption of the chairmanship of this Committee. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election. I wish to extend our heartfelt congratulations and sincere appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Matia Mulumba Semakula Kiwanuka of Uganda for the outstanding manner in which he had conducted the deliberations of the Committee during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

2. I join others in paying tribute to the former Under-Secretary General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala for his invaluable contributions to multilateral disarmament efforts. May I also welcome and congratulate Mr. Nobuyasu Abe on his appointment as the new Under-Secretary General. I am convinced that given his vast experience and diplomatic skill, Mr. Abe would continue the excellent tradition of Mr. Dhanapala in leading the Department of Disarmament Affairs in the promotion of the disarmament agenda of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman,

3. The year 2003 is a significant as well as a dismal year for disarmament. On 23 May 2003, we commemorated the 25th anniversary of the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD-I). It is worth recapitulating here that the Final Document of the SSOD-I underscores that general and complete disarmament under effective international control is the ultimate goal of multilateral disarmament efforts. Yet after 25 years, the goal is far from being achieved. Hence there was nothing to celebrate in May. Earlier in March the United States, United Kingdom and their coalition partners launched a war against Iraq to get rid of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons. Last week, it was revealed that weapons of mass destruction have not yet been found in Iraq. The unilateral search for them goes on and the United Nations inspection regime is cast aside. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea announced its decision to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and has claimed that it now has nuclear weapons capability. This certainly endangers the political and security situation in the region concerned.

4. In 2003 also, we have witnessed the failure of the United Nations Disarmament Commission to adopt a substantive report on the two items discussed after four years of deliberation. The Open-Ended Working Group Meeting to consider the Objectives and Agenda for a Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-IV) ended without any results. The Conference on Disarmament is still entangled in uncertainty over its programme of work. My delegation is indeed disheartened by all these developments. However, we do not lose hope completely.

5. The Secretary-General has vividly described the state of affairs of multilateral disarmament efforts in his report on the work of the Organisation. He has stated that the body of the multilateral disarmament norms has been slowly eroded as a result of weakened international commitment. I am sure many delegations agree with him.

Mr. Chairman,

6. My delegation is disappointed with the lack of progress in the field of disarmament. This situation must be rectified. Malaysia believes that the key ingredient to progress in the area of disarmament is the establishment of mutual trust. The question of disarmament is intricately

linked with the issue of security of states. In this connection, it is critical that efforts to promote confidence-building measures be pursued. States must be able to trust other states. This can be achieved if states fully adhere to the provisions of international disarmament treaties and conventions that they are parties to. The provisions of these treaties and conventions must be implemented in a verifiable, irreversible, equitable and balanced manner. There is no room for selectivity and double standards. Otherwise, the universality of these treaties and conventions would be undermined.

7. At SSOD-I member states agreed that nuclear weapons posed the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of human civilization. Today, all states agree that weapons of mass destruction (WMD), in particular nuclear weapons, still pose a serious threat to humanity. While it is not wrong to argue that the proliferation of WMD is a threat to international peace and security, we must not forget that the existence of these weapons in the first place is a threat to humanity. In this connection, Malaysia cannot but agree with the Secretary-General that there is no "good" or "bad" proliferation. The nuclear weapons states must also fulfill their commitments towards significant reduction in their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament. Non-compliance also applies to nuclear disarmament and not only to nuclear non-proliferation. In this regard, the implementation of Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons by nuclear weapons states is crucial.

9. It has been said that a prime weakness of major WMD regimes are the lack of their verification and enforcement mechanisms. However, it should be noted that the Chemical Weapon Convention has its own verification mechanism in the form of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). By the same token, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is the mechanism to verify whether states parties of the NPT are in compliance with Article III of the Treaty. What is required is the political will to ensure that these mechanisms can work in a fair, balanced and non-discriminatory manner while taking into consideration the interests of everyone involved.

10. Malaysia believes that full adherence to all provisions of international disarmament treaties and conventions by the states parties are the only sustainable approach towards multilateral disarmament. We agree that there is a need to strengthen the verification and enforcement mechanisms relating to WMD. This can certainly be done through the strengthening of these regimes without resorting to other means. Any proposals outside these established legal regimes, especially through a political body such as the Security Council, might result in the unraveling of these regimes with serious consequences for all of us.

11. Malaysia is committed towards the promotion of nuclear disarmament. In this connection, we shall carry out our obligations as a non nuclear weapons state party to the NPT. We would continue to work with other ASEAN colleagues in realizing our aspiration for the acceptance of a nuclear weapons free zone in South East Asia. We would continue to support the promotion of nuclear weapons free zones in other parts of the world, in particular in the Middle-East. Malaysia would also continue to work with other like-minded countries to pursue follow-up action to the General Assembly resolution on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the legality of the threat and use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

12. International peace and security cannot be fully maintained without significant progress in the area of disarmament. The international community already possesses the necessary tools to advance the disarmament process. What is required is for the existing legal structures

to be strengthened with the full backing of the political will of states. In this regard, the appeal by the Secretary General for greater political will cannot be overstated. Without political will, there cannot be a genuine solution to international disarmament issues. This is one important element already highlighted at SSOD-I as the decisive factor for achieving real measures in disarmament. Perhaps, it is about time for all of us to return to the beginning and reorient ourselves towards the common objective of achieving general and complete disarmament.

13. It is important that favourable conditions be created for the further advancement of the global disarmament process. In this connection, all states should strictly abide by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. Any action that ignores the provisions of the Charter and that is not compatible with the principles of international law would adversely affect serious and genuine efforts in the field of disarmament. In this regard, Malaysia underscores the vital importance of multilateralism and multilaterally agreed solutions in addressing disarmament and international security issues.

Mr. Chairman,

14. The revitalization of the General Assembly has been one of the central themes at the General Debate of this Session of the General Assembly over the past two weeks. My delegation agrees that the United Nations requires reform and the General Assembly needs to be revitalized so as to be able to effectively address both old and new challenges. The First Committee, as one of the main committees of the General Assembly, should be included in the process. Indeed, we are aware of the plan by the Chair to allocate at least half a session to deal with this subject. My delegation supports this. However, my delegation wishes to stress that the issue must be addressed in a holistic manner. It has to be considered comprehensively in the context of the revitalization of the General Assembly. It should not be treated in a manner exclusive to the First Committee only. Malaysia believes that the matter is best addressed at the working group of the Plenary chaired by the President of the Assembly when the appropriate time presents itself.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.