



Permanent Mission of Eritrea
to the United Nations

Check against delivery

Statement by Dr. Amare Tekle, Diplomatic and Foreign Affairs Advisor
Office of the President of the State of Eritrea

in the **First Committee** of the United Nations General Assembly, 58th session

GENERAL DEBATE

New York, 13 October 2003

Chairperson,

Allow me to join others before me in congratulating you on your election as the Chairman of the First Committee. I also wish to seize this opportunity to congratulate the other members of the Bureau. I am certain that, with your vast experience and proven skills, you will be able to guide us to a successful conclusion of our deliberations. Allow me also to congratulate Mr. Nobuyasu Abe on his appointment as Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and to thank him for his useful introductory remarks.

Chairperson,

As always, issues related to **international security, disarmament, arms control** and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction continue to predominate our deliberations; and, as always, there have been mixed results during the past year as achievements have been countervailed by challenges.

It has been gratifying to note that the Ottawa Convention on Anti-personnel Mines, the Biological and Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty have attracted the signature/ratification of more member states while the Ad Hoc Group on Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention has achieved significant progress in its effort to establish a verification and compliance regime. However, it is a matter of serious concern that recent developments have resulted in the loss of hope in the disarmament process.

On the one hand, the Conference on Disarmament has not yet achieved any progress because of the failure of negotiations on nuclear disarmament and the Treaty on Fissile Materials. On the other, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which, I am pleased to announce, my country has now signed, has yet to enter into force while the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) remains in doubt.

Equally ominous are recent developments, which indicate the possible risk of the use of nuclear weapons in any future armed conflict. The problem is compounded by the threat posed by terrorism and the distinct possibility that weapons of mass destruction can be easily acquired by terrorist groups. In a globalized world, such globalized threats become global concerns which demand global actions.

Chairperson,

It is a hackneyed but valid truism that disarmament benefits mankind not only because it eliminates threats to peace, security and, indeed, civilization but also because it may help to divert scarce material and financial resources to development efforts. Every available human development report confirms that the goals of the Millennium Development Declaration could be achieved by only a small fraction of the trillion dollars spent on armaments by nations big and small.

Chairperson,

Non-proliferation can be-and must be-achieved. The Eritrean delegation is convinced that the **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** and the **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)** continue to be the only viable options for complete and universal disarmament. Accordingly, serious effort must be exerted to ensure the success of the NPT Preparatory Meeting in Geneva and the Review Conference in 2005.

Eritrea would also welcome the resumption of the Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention and hopes that it will be able to reach an agreement on a Final Declaration, which will strengthen the BWC.

Chairperson,

Conventional Weapons have been the major instruments of destruction during the past few decades, particularly in the third world. The improvement in production technology, the sophistication and the availability of limitless quantities of weapons as well as the eagerness of, and indeed the great competition between, the producers to sell have enabled conflicting parties, in both inter-and intra-state conflicts, to avail themselves of these weapons and to use them with willful abandon. The combination of irresponsibility, callousness and greed have not only caused massive destruction to life and property but also drained meager financial resources, which could have been used to combat extreme poverty and famine, and have destroyed the already fragile economies of, and destabilized, numerous countries. It is for this reason that the implementation of the UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eliminate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light weapons in All Its Aspects assumes significance. The meaningful implementation of the program could be achieved only if collective and individual action is taken at the international, regional and sub-regional levels. Let us, for example, take the case of Somalia in the Horn of Africa. That beleaguered country is unnecessarily suffering from an influx of an inordinate amount of small arms and light weapons supplied by one of its neighbors, which hopes to influence events in that country by destabilizing it. The people and government of Somalia have already publicly identified that country. It behooves this neighbor that its interests can be best served not by lawlessness, the callous disregard for the rule of law and deliberate violation of international conventions but by assisting the return of a united and stable Somalia to its rightful place in the international community.

The international community must not tolerate those governments which squander their meager resources on buying weapons for their illegal and immoral military adventures against their neighbors while their populations are being ravaged by extreme poverty and, indeed, are being decimated by famines of biblical proportions. It must not countenance a political culture which nourishes and sustains the **Arms and Alms** diplomacy of irresponsible and immoral governments which shamelessly and publicly scold donor governments which seem to be hesitating to send food aid while they went on an arms purchase spree with willful abandon.

Chairperson,

Landmines have become threats to human security and hence the stability and welfare, indeed the very existence, of states in many regions of the world, but particularly in Africa. The Horn of Africa is one of these adversely affected regions. The Eritrean people have been victims of anti-personnel land mines during the thirty years liberation struggle and the three years war in defense of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of their country. Indeed, innocent civilians, who are the primary victims of land mines, continue to suffer because of Ethiopian land mines planted after the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities and Comprehensive Peace Agreements between the two countries. This has been confirmed by UNMEE on several occasions. It is for this reason that Eritrea is committed to the creation of a regional and international environment genuinely free from anti-personnel mines. This is good for security and development as well as peaceful relations and cooperation between neighbors. Accordingly, we welcome the good results achieved during the fourth meeting of state parties held in Geneva in 2002. However, it must be recognized that the signing and ratification of the Land Mines Treaty will be meaningless as long as a few rogue states continue to produce and sell these infernal weapons to equally few rogue states which use them against the law-abiding states which have been faithfully implementing the Convention but may, sooner or later, have second thoughts about their goodwill and good deeds.

Chairperson,

Eritrea has a deep and abiding interest in the maintenance of peace and security and the **peaceful settlement of disputes** if only because it has first-hand experience of the negative consequences of war and conflict on the development of nations and the welfare of their peoples. Even during the liberation struggle, Eritreans had only insisted on the peaceful exercise of their right to self-determination. During the last war, they had steadfastly advocated a peaceful resolution of the territorial dispute with Ethiopia as they had done with their other neighbors. They have invariably acted honorably and in good faith. Thus, they held a referendum, two years after the liberation of their country, even though they had won the war. They accepted the verdict of the Eritrea-Yemen Arbitration Commission without conditions or reservations and implemented it promptly. They resolved their problem peacefully with Djibouti. They have accepted the decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Arbitration Commission without much ado. Yet, the decision has not been implemented because Ethiopia has decided to reject the unanimous, final and binding decision of an Arbitration Commission, sanctioned by the Security Council and whose decisions have been endorsed by the UN and the international community. Consequently peace, security, stability and peaceful development are in the balance. Ethiopia, in fact, has declared that it is still committed to the cause of war by threatening to use force against any attempt to make it leave territories that it is occupying in contravention of the decision.

Chairperson,

Eritrea has always been ready to engage in political dialogue with the view to fostering good neighborly and cooperative relations with all its neighbors because of its vision of, and hope for, a new zone of peace, stability and cooperative relations in the Horn of Africa. This vision was articulated even before formal independence. The vision and hope became official policy after formal independence. They remain valid today as they were a decade ago.

Yet, dialogue and confidence building efforts do not thrive in a vacuum but on a wellspring of **good faith** and a commitment to **the rule of law** and the principle of *Pacta Sunt Servanda*. One single demonstration of good faith, a public announcement that Ethiopia accepts all of the decisions of the Arbitration Commission without any reservations, including the decision that Badme and its environs belong to Eritrea, and then the faithful and expeditious implementation of that decision, will lead to confidence building dialogue. Any other option is a non-starter.

I thank you.