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**Statement by His Excellency Mr. Murari Raj Sharma,
Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations,
at the General Debate of the First Committee of the 58th General Assembly
(New York: October 13, 2003)**

Mr. Chairman,

I warmly felicitate you on your unanimous election to preside over the deliberations of this very important committee. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

Let me also welcome Mr. Nobuyasu Abe, as Under Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and appreciate him for his comprehensive remarks early in this session on the pressing issues of disarmament and international security.

My delegation also commends Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, the former Under Secretary-General, for his invaluable contributions to the cause of disarmament.

Mr. Chairman,

We are meeting again at a time when international security is in huge turmoil and disarmament is in deep slumber. Non-proliferation Treaty provisions have been observed in their breach more than in their compliance. The fear is growing that terrorists could get hold of weapons of mass destruction. And disarmament is slipping off the global priority.

A stark example of this erosion is the impasse multilateral disarmament forums are facing now. The Disarmament Commission has not been able to agree on the objectives and agenda, and on setting up a preparatory committee, for the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament.

Even worse, the Conference on Disarmament has been caught in a prison of inertia, as its members have failed to agree on a program of work for last seven years. Meanwhile, countries with huge stockpiles of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction are adamant to hold on to their deadly arsenals. This has prompted other nations to pursue the nuclear option and frustrated non-proliferation efforts.

The bilateral track of nuclear disarmament has also lost the momentum at the moment. No major new initiative has been launched to draw down the stockpiles of nuclear weapons over sometime now. We urge nuclear powers to evolve soon strategy for reducing and eventually eliminating their nuclear arms in a time-bound manner.

Mr. Chairman,

The framework of action is already there in the form of the 13 practical steps included in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference. Nuclear powers must be honest in fulfilling their obligations pursuant to Article VI of the NPT. Whether we like it or not, without their leading the way by example, non-proliferation will be difficult to achieve and impossible to sustain.

Nepal welcomes the recent entry into force of the Moscow Treaty Strategic Offensive Reduction agreed to between the United States and the Russian Federation. These countries, together with other nuclear weapons states, must take irreversible and verifiable new measures steadily to reduce their nuclear arms.

Nuclear technology is fungible and could be misused. Nuclear accidents could happen as well. Both bring devastating consequences. So Nepal supports the peaceful use of this technology but only under reliable precautions and non-discriminatory safeguards.

It is a matter of disquiet that the CTBT and the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty are still grounded. The fact that terrorists are seeking weapons of mass destruction points to the urgency of working on the FMCT.

I congratulate countries of Central Asia that their region will soon become a nuclear-weapons-free zone, adding laurel to regional arms control efforts. I also commend Mongolia for its novel proposal to institutionalize its status as a Single State Nuclear Free Zone. Nepal welcomes the proposals of Egypt and other nations for the establishment of zones free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Chairman,

Notwithstanding the failures in the field of nuclear disarmament, there is discernible room for optimism in chemical and biological weapons control regimes. Yet, we need to make sure through strong verification measures that those regimes are not violated and integrity is maintained.

A persistent advocate of complete and general disarmament, particularly of nuclear weapons, Nepal supports measures to prevent an arms race in outer space. Likewise, the seabed and Antarctica should remain pristine as the common heritage of mankind.

My delegation strongly holds the view that a growing proliferation of ballistic missiles is a menace to international peace and security. Hence, a multilateral regime to control missiles has become urgent; and we all need to work strenuously to put it together.

Mr. Chairman,

Nepal is happy that there is a consensus to take concrete and urgent measures for the implementation of the Program of Action to control small arms and light weapons. But a yawning gap in approach to combat the illicit trade in small arms persists. A genuine global partnership is imperative to curb the menace posed by the illicit trade in such arms and to stop their misuse by non-state actors

We also support the expansion of the UN Conventional Arms Register as an effective confidence building measure. In this context, the Panel of Government Experts should be encouraged to explore the ways and means for making the Register more comprehensive and its information more credible.

Mr. Chairman,

The role of regional centers for peace and disarmament is crucial to speed up the pace and process of disarmament and arms control at the regional level. Nepal is fully committed to relocate without delay the regional center for peace and disarmament for Asia and the Pacific to Kathmandu. I urge the Secretariat to pave the way for the early relocation by quickly revising the Host Country Agreement and the MOU consistent with diplomatic practices and precedents.

Mr. Chairman,

Multilateralism is the only road that will lead to a comprehensive and durable peace in the world. Evolution of a culture of peace founded on conflict prevention, disarmament and mutual confidence is essential for such peace. We ought to wake up multilateral disarmament from its slumber and put it back on a steady course. Bilateral track must complement and reinforce the multilateral one.

This will entail strengthening the multilateral institutions and processes for disarmament and revitalizing the First Committee. My delegation is prepared to work with others to achieve these objectives.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.