

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful once again for this opportunity to address the distinguished members of this Committee as it begins its work on the important agenda before it. I should firstly like to extend my personal congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, on your appointment to guide the work of this Committee. I also wish to extend my appreciation to the members of the Bureau and assure you all of the fullest cooperation and support of the Department for Disarmament Affairs. I and my colleagues look forward to providing whatever assistance may be required to ensure this will be an efficient and productive session.

We meet at a particularly difficult and challenging moment for disarmament and nonproliferation, and a time of heightened global anxiety about weapons of mass destruction – particularly nuclear weapons. I believe that it is our responsibility, even more than is normally the case, to use this meeting to promote and strengthen the various multilateral efforts to reduce or eliminate the threat they pose.

However it can be a secret to no one in this room that collectively we are at present signally stumbling to meet that challenge. The recent World Summit demonstrated that States could not agree on the way forward on disarmament, nonproliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

I believe that the words of the Secretary-General perfectly encapsulate both the nature of the problem and set it in its wider context. In his address to the World Summit he said:

“Twice this year - at the NPT review conference, and now at this Summit - we have allowed posturing to get in the way of results. This is inexcusable. Weapons of mass destruction pose a grave danger to us all, particularly in a world threatened by terrorists with global ambitions and no inhibitions. We must pick up the pieces in order to renew negotiations on this vital issue...”

I may also quote from the letter the President of the General Assembly, Jan Eliasson, wrote to all the delegates on 30 September. It said: “The Document should not set a limit on our ambitions; rather it should be a beachhead from which we launch ourselves forward. We should recognize that it does not incorporate all that many of you wanted. There are some areas which the Document does not address in detail where many would—rightly – like to see progress during the 60th session. One such area is disarmament and nonproliferation, or which I would encourage new and creative thinking in all appropriate fora.”

It falls in some large measure to this Committee to begin that task of trying to pick up the pieces and provide fresh orientations. You are expected to provide guidance about the way in which the Conference on Disarmament might address the long-awaited negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, as well as on such issues as Negative Security Assurances, Outer Space, or the fundamental question of complete nuclear disarmament.

You may consider what practical steps we may take to ensure the continuing health and strength of the NPT. It is too important a matter for us to stand idle. The urgent international concern about the imminent proliferation risk is still there. Nuclear warheads are still numbered in their thousands.

It was, therefore, very encouraging to note that the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Chile, Indonesia, Norway, Romania, South Africa and the United Kingdom took their initiative to seek a consensus in the field of nuclear disarmament and proliferation in preparation for the World Summit. I am encouraged to note that some Member States, for example Norway, out of concern about the current critical state of affairs, have expressed their willingness to continue their efforts to seek a new consensus.

In this connection, I may note that a conference was held immediately following the World Summit in New York to reaffirm the determination to bring the CTBT into force and to underline its importance for world disarmament and nonproliferation.

In implementing the agreements reached at last year's session, the First Committee has invited a number of experts to the Thematic Discussion on Substantive Issues. International Treaty Organizations as well as chairpersons of UN disarmament bodies will participate as well with a view to promoting interactive discussions in the Committee. This is a new attempt and the Secretariat will be open for further suggestions. Representatives of civil society, for example, the Middle Powers Initiative or the Mayors for Peace, have expressed their intention to engage themselves in the debates with the delegates to the First Committee. Through these occasions, you may sense the outside temperature and broaden your perspective.

Biological and chemical weapons also remain as major items on our agenda, because of their potentially massive and indiscriminate effects. 2005 has seen important anniversaries of the 1925 Geneva Protocol which first sought to ban both classes of weapon and the 1975 entry into force of the Biological Weapons Convention. Many will already be looking ahead to the 6th Review Conference of the BWC in 2006 and hoping it can successfully map the way ahead. The real challenge here remains that of bringing these treaties closer to universality and to secure full and effective compliance.

The Department for Disarmament Affairs is not sitting idle under the increasing concern about the threat of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction. It is assisting the Committee established according to Security Council resolution 1540. With the help of a group of experts the Committee is currently examining the national reports submitted by the UN Member States. There are many measures to be taken to establish domestic laws and regulations to criminalize activities concerning proliferation of WMD to non-state actors and to establish and tighten export and border controls. Furthermore, the Committee is actively pursuing the outreach activities and assistance in cooperation with willing Member States.

The preponderant focus on the WMD threat should not lessen our attention to the matters relating to the regulation and reduction of conventional arms and armed forces. Despite the fact that much progress has been made by the international community to address

the problem of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, their proliferation continues to pose a serious threat to peace and security in too many regions of the world. It is too easily overlooked that conventional weapons continue to kill many thousands of people every year. These are often everyday tragedies that are rarely reported, but which bring human misery and suffering in their wake. I look forward to the Committee taking an action for the early and effective implementation of the draft international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons, and to providing directions for the way forward for succeeding works.

Let me now draw your attention to the part of the World Summit Outcome Document on Strengthening the United Nations, that stated: "We reaffirm our commitment to strengthen the United Nations with a view to enhancing its authority and efficiency, as well as its capacity to address effectively, and in accordance with the purposes and principles of its Charter, the full range of challenges of our time. We are determined to reinvigorate the intergovernmental organs of the United Nations and to adapt them to the needs of the twenty-first century." This is exactly what the First Committee has been striving for. I recall the intensive discussions last year on how to improve the effectiveness of the work of the Committee. The Summit has given renewed emphasis on such efforts. I, therefore, look forward to the Committee's continued efforts towards this goal.

I remember addressing the question of economizing and making effective use of the reports prepared by the Secretariat in compliance with the General Assembly resolutions. I shall have an opportunity to report back to you on that matter later during your proceedings. The Department for Disarmament Affairs has also been reviewing the work of our three Regional Centres in Latin American and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific with a view to better serving the Member States. I will be consulting with many delegations in the weeks ahead.

All delegations will have received this morning at their missions and on their desks a copy of the 2004 edition of the United Nations Disarmament Yearbook, the 29th Volume since it was first published in 1976. The Yearbook is the centrepiece of the Department's information programme. It contains condensed background information on the annual

activities of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly made last year in resolution 59/103 that the Department use more electronic means to disseminate information, the Department, for the first time, will post shortly on its web site an electronic version in English of the 2004 Yearbook, as well as electronic archive versions in English of the 2002 and 2003 Yearbook. An announcement will be made when the web site is ready for use.

Though the work ahead for the Committee will, I am sure, at times be difficult, I hope that we can collectively try to raise our sights and our aspirations to try and move beyond current preoccupations in order to properly address the fundamental problems which are of concern to us all. I believe, above all, that we owe a duty to those many millions of people outside this room, who ultimately look to us and this Organisation to guide and light the way ahead.

Please, therefore, accept my very best wishes for an effective, successful and productive session.

Thank you.