



HOLY SEE

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**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore
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61st session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

**First Committee
General debate on all disarmament
and international security agenda items**

New York, 5 October 2006

Madam Chair,

My delegation congratulates you on your election and assures you and your colleagues on the Bureau of our full support.

At one level, the summer of 2006 appears to have been discouraging, with conflicts, destruction and loss of life. The Small Arms Conference failed to produce any tangible result. World stocks of almost 27,000 nuclear weapons remain alarmingly high. World military expenditures for the second consecutive year exceeded \$1 trillion.

But at another level, a stirring in human consciousness is taking place that would suggest that war does not work. Military force does not bring the expected improvement for the common good. Recent wars have unleashed forces that still corrode civilizations and the consequent human suffering is inexcusable in an age that possesses the mechanisms for negotiation, mediation, peacemaking, and peacekeeping.

Despite the present gloom, positive features can be discerned in the broader field of security, as noted in the report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. The number of interstate conflicts has been declining. Peacekeeping operations prevent shooting wars in many places. The Peacebuilding Commission readies itself to assist states emerging from conflict, thus reducing the risk of their relapse into violence.

This Committee, in its turn, should help the international community to seek the benefits of an increasingly interdependent world. Dialogue is necessary to reach this goal, and much better dialogue is needed in the disarmament fora of the United Nations. This is because, at present, the debate seems to remain sterile. Too often, the debates over small arms and nuclear weapons are carried on in abstract terms from preconceived positions and there is little sign of willingness to learn.

If the human dimension that underlies the subject of small arms were emphasized, perhaps a much needed Arms Trade Treaty could be achieved. The \$4 billion annual trade in small arms is not yet subject to a comprehensive global agreement. Instead, there is a patchwork of national export laws, which unscrupulous arms dealers can circumvent. Six hundred and forty million of these weapons in the world today kill and maim tens of thousands, spark refugee crises, undermine the rule of law, and spawn a culture of violence and impunity.

This is the human side of the small arms debate which has a deep impact also on children. Surely focusing on the huge numbers of those who suffer from the illicit spread of small arms should impel us to achieve an Arms Trade Treaty.

The Holy See takes this opportunity to appeal again to the international community to establish an obligatory legal framework aimed at regulating the trade of conventional weapons of any type, as well as regulating the know-how and technology for their production. In this regard, my delegation supports the draft Resolution aimed at establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms as a step towards a comprehensive internationally binding instrument on this issue. Moreover, the UN Register of Conventional Arms needs stronger support. More transparency in arms is necessary if we are to advance confidence-building measures.

Dialogue must also be advanced in the area of nuclear weapons. The urgency of this increases daily. Recently, the Secretary-General said the world had reached a crossroads in this regard. One path can take us to a world in which the proliferation of nuclear weapons is restricted and reversed through trust, dialogue and negotiated agreement. The other path leads to a world in which rapidly growing numbers of states feel obliged to arm themselves with nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear terrorism grows. My delegation agrees that the international community seems almost to be sleepwalking down the latter path, not by conscious choice but rather through miscalculation, sterile debate and the paralysis of multilateral mechanisms for confidence-building and conflict resolution.

This is a strong indictment which urges all interested parties to make clear commitments to implement the NPT, to facilitate the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, to negotiate a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, to legalize the Negative Security Assurances, and to take nuclear weapons off high-alert status. These steps are valuable in and of themselves. They would also decrease the risks of use, diminish the access of terrorists to catastrophic weapons, and generate support for strengthening non-proliferation.

The Holy See has spoken often on this subject, asking that those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them, agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. Policies of nuclear deterrence, typical of the Cold War, can and must be replaced by concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations.

Thank you, Madam Chair.