



Statement of

H.E. Mr. Reaz Rahman

**State Minister for Foreign Affairs
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

**at the Plenary of the
Conference on Disarmament
16 March 2004**

**Permanent Mission of Bangladesh
Geneva**

Please check against delivery

Mr. President,

Introduction

1. I am privileged to address the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. Over the years, this forum has not only proven effective and relevant in the field of arms control and nuclear disarmament, but has immensely contributed to the global peace and security. It is our hope that we will be able to renew meaningful progress in the work of the Conference and build upon the solid achievements of the past.

Mr. President

2. Bangladesh's support for general and complete disarmament is total and unswerving. It is a constitutional commitment. We are party to almost all disarmament related treaties including the NPT, CTBT, CWC, CCW, APMI and the BWC. We attach great importance to the strict adherence, non-discriminatory enforcement and verification of their respective goals. We shall continue to contribute to all endeavours leading to general and complete disarmament, partial or otherwise.

Nuclear Disarmament

3. Nuclear weapons constitute the single most dangerous threat to mankind. For the past three and a half decades, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty has been the most important and widely accepted instrument for preventing the spread of nuclear arms. Today, it is faced with serious challenges that can unravel the whole process.
4. As a State Party to the NPT, Bangladesh has consciously given up its option to go nuclear. Furthermore, it is a measure of some importance that we are the first country in South Asia to sign the CTBT. These steps are tangible testimony to our constitutional commitment towards general and complete disarmament.
5. In our own region, we welcome the resumption of dialogue between our two nuclear neighbours. Their face-off had dire spillover implications for all countries in the sub-continent who had a legitimate concern to end it. It is our sincere hope that they will move towards strengthening measures for durable peace in South Asia.
6. We welcomed the entry into force in June last year of the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States. Although this treaty does not fully compensate for the abrogation of the ABM treaty, it is an important development in nuclear disarmament. We continue to hold that it is only the total elimination of nuclear weapons that can provide absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty

7. The 1995 NPT Review Conference had called for an early commencement and conclusion of negotiations on FMCT which constitutes an important step forward in the non-proliferation context. Bangladesh supports the negotiating mandate for a non-discriminatory, multilateral and international and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other explosive devices. Negotiations should extend to existing stockpiles without which any such treaty will be incomplete.
8. We believe, it is vitally important to address the undertakings agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference for effective implementation of the NPT. In this context, Nuclear Weapon States have special responsibilities to shoulder. We are disappointed that very little progress has been achieved towards the elimination of nuclear armament despite the unequivocal undertaking given by the nuclear weapon States at the 2000 Review Conference.
9. Lack of progress in the full implementation of the 13 practical steps identified by the 2000 Review Conference has also been disheartening. We would like all State parties to the NPT to reaffirm their full commitment to that Programme of Action and to make genuine effort for its implementation. Together, we must pursue in earnest, the all-important goal of general and complete nuclear disarmament under strict and effective international control as required by Article VI of the NPT.

Nuclear Weapon Free Zones

10. Bangladesh strongly supports regional approaches to nuclear disarmament including establishment of Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in South Asia, in the Middle East and in other parts of the world. We believe, this will greatly contribute to regional confidence building measures and reduce threat to the security of non-nuclear weapons states.

Negative Security Assurance

11. We are deeply concerned at the changes in nuclear policy of certain nuclear weapon countries to ease out of their commitment not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states. The unilateral pledge of Nuclear Weapons States, reaffirmed by Security Council resolution 984 (1995) has been an important element for states to forgo the nuclear option, thereby contributing positively towards elimination of nuclear weapons. Non-nuclear state parties to the NPT have a legitimate right to receive an unconditional assurance from the Nuclear weapons states that they will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against them. It is, therefore, critically important that renewed and vigorous efforts are taken on a priority basis to conclude a universal, unconditional and legally binding instrument to provide security assurances to Non-nuclear weapons states. This we believe would securely anchor the non-proliferation regime.

Prevention of an Arms race in the Outer Space

12. Outer space is the common heritage of humankind. It is the desire of the global community that outer space be explored only for peaceful purposes and for the welfare and benefit of humankind. Militarization of outer space could lead to an arms race which, we believe, would be detrimental to global peace and stability. The onus lies on countries that have the capability to reach outer space to ensure that outer space is used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
13. We are convinced that prevention of an arms race in the outer space is possible only through a legally binding international instrument. We hope there will be an early commencement of negotiations, for an international legally binding treaty to prevent deployment of arms in outer space.

Ottawa Convention

14. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention banning use of anti-personnel landmines. Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia which is party to the Convention. For us, this constitutes yet another bold step as none of our neighbours have joined the Convention. This accords with our humanitarian commitment to eliminate suffering caused by anti-personnel land mines. We remain fully committed to the core humanitarian objectives of the Convention. We will be starting the destruction of existing stockpiles of landmines in our country very soon and hope to complete the process of destruction of stockpile before our deadline of March 2005.
15. Universalization of the Convention remains a major challenge for the global community. There are some encouraging signs. It is heartening to note that 141 countries have joined the Convention. We believe the suffering caused by the anti-personnel mine should be the single most compelling reason to encourage the remaining few to join the Convention. We appeal to them to do so.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

16. Small arms and light weapons cause massive humanitarian suffering all around the world. It is estimated that more than 500,000 people die each year from wounds caused by light firearms, making it one of the most deadly killers prevalent today. Of them, 90% are civilians, and 50% are children while 30% are women. There are more weapons in the hands of civilians than those of legitimate armed forces. Moreover, the easy availability of light weapons makes it easy to give them to children, thereby aggravating the incidence of child soldiers.
17. The focus should be on eliminating illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons through effective implementation of the Programme of Action drawn up in 2001. The First Biennial meeting to consider the implementation of the Programme of Action to prevent, combat and eradicate illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in July

2003 provided an opportunity to build an effective international and regional partnership to deal with the problem. We believe that it is only through greater political commitment and closer cooperation, regionally as well as internationally, that this problem can be addressed effectively. The momentum gained in 2003 must be maintained.

Disarmament and Development

18. For us development is a priority. It is our strong conviction that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can best be achieved through reduction of military expenditure and diversion of resources to poverty eradication and sustained confidence building measures through international political cooperation. Renewed effort is needed to reverse the trend of increasing military expenditure by major military powers. Such military expenditure over the last few years has crossed the \$ 800 billion mark globally in current dollar terms. But we cannot say if such increased arms build up and increased military expenditure has made the world any safer. On the other hand, even if a small part of the huge military expenditure is diverted to the social and economic development we can free the world population from scourge of poverty and make it a safer place to live. The linkage between peace dividend and global fund for poverty eradication should be seriously pursued.

Stalemate in the CD

19. Bangladesh is deeply concerned over the continued impasse in the Conference on Disarmament. The work of the Conference has remained stalled for a number of years. Such an impasse gives rise to speculations about its effectiveness and relevance. We must act now to prevent such erosion. We must rise above our individual interest for the collective safety and security of humankind. It would be unfortunate if we do not make genuine efforts to put the CD back on tracks.

Programme of Work

20. The Conference has before it the proposal of the five distinguished past presidents of the CD. The A5 proposal, as it has come to be popularly known, represents a cross-regional initiative for a Programme of Work for the CD. The proposal does not necessarily meet all expectations. But we must not forego the "good" in search of the "best". This may never happen. In our view, the proposal seems balanced and a good basis for reaching a consensus.

Conclusion

21. The CD is under close scrutiny of the international community. It must live upto its expectation. Let us give it chance to be relevant through concrete actions. We must forge together a collective political resolve to make the world a more peaceful, secure and safer place to live.

I thank you Mr. President.