Statement before the United Nations Disarmament Commission

by
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, given the uncertainty shrouding the commission's work ahead, I am not sure if I should, but let me begin by congratulating you upon your election to the Chair and by pledging that the Department for Disarmament Affairs will provide its full cooperation and substantive support for your efforts throughout this session.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the former Chairman, Ambassador Mario Maiolini, and the chairmen of the previous session's working groups, Mr. Alaa Issa and Santiago Mourão, for their many efforts to reach a consensus on the two items on last year's agenda items, "ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament" and "practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms." Though the consensus proved elusive, they deserve the respect of all members of this Commission for their dedicated work to advance that agreed agenda.

Since its creation in January 1952, the work of this Commission has been shaped by the political will of its members and other dynamic forces arising both within individual member states and in the relations between such states. In its ongoing efforts to build a new consensus on various disarmament guidelines and recommendations, the Commission must therefore steer a steady course between shared concerns and common hopes.

The world today faces many new and persisting concerns. The September 11 terrorist attacks heightened concerns about the possibility that terrorists might acquire and use WMD. While the War in Iraq was fought over the WMD issue -- various stories, revelations, and compliance questions continue to abound over suspicious WMD developments elsewhere. Meanwhile, each day brings in new reports of tragic casualties from small arms and light weapons around the world.

In addition to these emerging threats, concerns persist about the continued presence of WMD arsenals and the renewal or elaboration of various doctrines governing the use of such weapons. There is frequent talk about a "crisis" facing the multilateral system on disarmament, arms control, and nonproliferation.

I think the correct response to all these concerns lies not in discarding the multilateral system or collective international efforts, but in the increased joint efforts to strengthen the multilateral system of international peace and security, including this system for disarmament, arms control and nonproliferation. Given the urgency of all these questions, no institution working in these fields can be complacent -- and the Disarmament Commission is no exception.

I, therefore, strongly hope that the Commission will come up with a good, relevant agenda for this session and will engage in meaningful and productive discussions during the succeeding weeks. The world is waiting for you to come out with correct answers to the urgent questions we are facing.

The Secretariat and myself stand ready to assist you in every way we may in your endeavor to achieve your goal.

Thank you.