

**STATEMENT BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS
DISARMAMENT COMMISSION (UNDC)**

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely gratified by this first opportunity in my new capacity as Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, to address the members of this Commission 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 Commission. I also wish to and assure you all of the fullest cooperation and support from the Department for Disarmament Affairs. I and my colleagues look forward to providing whatever assistance may be required to ensure that this will be a productive session.

I also wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Chairman of the 2005 session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission, Ambassador Sylvester Rowe of Sierra Leone, for his own strenuous and ultimately successful efforts to reach agreement on a substantive agenda for the 2006 session.

We meet at a particularly difficult and challenging moment for disarmament and non-proliferation, and at a time of heightened international concern about weapons of mass destruction – particularly nuclear weapons. In addition to this there is now the possibility of acquisition by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction, as well as the all too numerous everyday tragedies of death from small arms.

Indeed, the scale of the difficulties we face at the present time should not be underestimated. Last year's World Summit demonstrated all too eloquently that States could not agree on the way forward on disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

I believe that the words of the Secretary-General perfectly encapsulate both the nature of our present difficulties and also set them in their wider context. In his address to the World Summit in September 2005 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...”

Recent developments have further tested the effectiveness of multilateral disarmament machinery. The UN Disarmament Commission plays a unique role. However, the Commission's recent record has itself been far from satisfactory. In 2003 the session

concluded without reaching consensus on concrete proposals to advance nuclear disarmament or confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms. No consensus was achieved on agenda items for its 2004 and 2005 sessions, and no substantive meetings were held in 2005.

In 2006 I believe that we have to do better. It falls in large measure to this session of the UNDC to provide fresh momentum. One should not lose such an opportunity.

It is imperative that we draw lessons from the setbacks that we witnessed last year. The lack of consensus on any text on disarmament and non-proliferation in the 2005 Summit Outcome document simply shows how much work remains to be done in this area. We should move forward from lamenting the lack of consensus documents and, as the President of the General Assembly Jan Eliasson encouraged, we make “new and creative thinking in all appropriate fora.”

By agreeing in December 2005 on the agenda item on “Recommendations for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects, in particular for achieving the objective of nuclear disarmament” – in addition to the item on conventional disarmament – the Disarmament Commission now has a substantive agenda for its new three-year cycle of consideration.

It is our responsibility, more than ever, to use this opportunity to strengthen the disarmament machinery to effectively deal with new emerging threats and challenges.

It is to be hoped therefore that over the next three weeks you will be able to provide guidance on the fundamental question of complete nuclear disarmament.

States need to build common and shared understanding of the most immediate nuclear threats and with it a systematic analysis of how changing threat perceptions influence the way we address the challenges of disarmament and non-proliferation.

As the NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective it is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote co-operation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament, you may wish, for example, to consider what practical steps might be taken to ensure the continuing relevance and strength of the Treaty. The urgency of international concern about the imminent risk of proliferation is very evident but it should not be forgotten at the same time that, globally, nuclear weapons continue to be numbered in their thousands.

Ultimately the outcome will depend on close cooperation between countries from every region of the world as well as international organisations, research institutions and think-tanks. While certainly the NPT review process is the important arena for assessing progress in implementing the global nuclear non-proliferation norm, the Disarmament Commission has the advantage of being a fully universal deliberative body, which enables it to complement the goals of the NPT review process. Working in tandem, these two arenas offer great potential to move the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda forward. I therefore call on all States to reflect on and implement concerted actions based on pragmatism and realism.

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 in certain areas, such as for instance in addressing 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. Symptomatic treatment and ad hoc solutions cannot yield durable results; there is a need for increased openness and transparency with regard to legitimate arms transfers for defensive purposes. Such openness will promote confidence. The challenge before the Commission is to consider and adopt measures that will contribute to reducing the threat to international peace and security posed by conventional weapons, while protecting the inherent right of all Member States to the means of self-defense. I believe that agreement among states on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons may alleviate pressures to acquire such weaponry, and encourage responsible conduct in the transfer of major conventional weapon systems, while reducing the risk of armed conflict.

I hope that in your consideration on the issue you could build on the achievements of the 2003 session, taking into due consideration the developments since then.

In conclusion, I should like to draw your attention to one part of the World Summit Outcome Document on Strengthening the United Nations, which said the following;

“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.”

The Summit gave renewed emphasis to such efforts, of which I see this session of UNDC as being an integral part. It is for that reason I look forward to the contribution that can be made by Member States to achieving this wider objective during the coming session. I am confident that you will find ways of making the Commission more effective as part of the overall efforts to reform of the United Nations.

We meet at a time when there is a continuing – and deeply depressing - stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament, the single multilateral disarmament negotiating body, due to an inability to reach agreement on a substantive programme of work. It is therefore now all the more important to revitalize and reaffirm the deliberative function of the Disarmament Commission.

As part of the multilateral disarmament machinery, the UN Disarmament Commission should continue to play its own unique role. For these reasons, I strongly hope that the Commission will be able to commence meaningful deliberations on the substantive issues this year, so as to demonstrate its continuing potential as an important and vital forum for the discussion of disarmament issues. I therefore call on delegations not to add organizational obstacles to the complexity of the issues before the Commission. I strongly encourage all delegations concerned to intensify their consultations on the nomination for the Chairperson of Working Group 1 as soon as possible so that the Commission could begin work on all its substantive agenda items.

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

Thank you.