Presentation to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly

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on Verification in all its Aspects

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BACKGROUND:

- UNGA resolution 59/60 established the UN Panel of Government Experts to “explore question of verification in all its aspects, including the role of the UN in the field of verification”.

- This is the third such UN Panel on Verification: the previous ones were held in 1990 and 1995.

- The Panel is chaired by Canada and met for three one-week sessions. The first session was held in New York from January 30-February 3 (2006); the second in Geneva from May 8-12 (2006); the third in New York from August 7-11.

- The aim of the Panel is to produce a Report for submission to the General Assembly. Under new UN guidelines, there is a strict word limitation for reports, which effectively means that the Panel’s Report cannot be more than 16 pages in length.

- This constraint has inspired the Panel members to work towards a relatively short, action-oriented report, including recommendations, for consideration by UN member states.
From the outset, the aim of the Panel has been a consensus Report. We have not wavered from this aim. Upon achieving a consensus Report, we would submit it to the Secretary General as well as to this Committee for its consideration and, we hope, endorsement.

The Chair of the Panel is required to submit his report to the Secretary-General during the 61st session of the General Assembly. Our work is continuing, even though the three formal meetings of the Panel are over. We are continuing our discussions electronically via email.

The Panel members have been acutely aware that our work should be as open as possible to the concerns and views of other UN member states. Not only is this a matter of transparency – it also comes from a genuine desire to be as inclusive as possible. We are not writing this Report or developing recommendations for Panel members only.

Instead, we are seeking, in a modest but hopefully useful way, to build anew a broad consensus on verification in all its aspects – and on the role of verification in contributing to the security of each and every one of us today and in the future.

I will return to the issue of consensus-building and how we set about addressing this in our work. First, a word or two about Panel composition and working methods.

PANEL COMPOSITION AND OUTREACH:

There are 16 members on the Panel. They are Argentina, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom, the United States and Ukraine).

This was determined by geographical representation and interest shown.
Some Member States initially expressed disappointment at not being selected for the Panel. However, the number of experts on the Panel – sixteen – was determined in keeping with a Panel’s more reduced size (in comparison with a Group). Moreover, the budget simply was not there to support financially the travel and costs of a larger Panel membership.

Because of the wide interest taken by others in our work, Panel members agreed from the very start that the Chair should use whatever opportunities available to explain the approach taken by the Panel and the work done to date.

To this end, the Chair held two lunch-time outreach sessions for UN Missions. The first was in New York on April 25th on the margins of the UN Disarmament Commission. The second was in Geneva on May 11th on the margins of the Panel’s second meeting.

One could consider my presentation today as the third in our series of outreach and transparency efforts. That is why I was so eager to accept your Chair’s kind invitation to address this Committee during your thematic debate on the subject of verification in all its aspects.

**WORKING METHODS:**

A word or two about scope and working methods.

The Panel’s work encompasses nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons, as well as their means of delivery. It also encompasses conventional weapons.

We have also looked at verification as it applies to activities involving non-state actors as well as states.

During the first two sessions, we looked at existing verification regimes in their specific contexts, examining strengths and shortcomings in terms of methods, procedures and technologies.
The first session concentrated more on WMD verification. The second shifted the focus, as we examined on conventional weapons and means of delivery.

The third session delved a bit deeper in aspects of UN sanctions and illicit transfers of conventional weapons – and the role of verification in such circumstances.

However, the bulk of the third session was devoted to a detailed, line-by-line reading and discussion of the draft Panel Report and its recommendations.

In order to stimulate discussions and provide food-for-thought, the Chair invited experts from a wide range of non-proliferation and arms control fields to give presentations to the Panel.

During the three sessions, the Panel received experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, the 1540 Committee, the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization, the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, the Group of Experts monitoring the Arms Embargo in regard to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and two representatives from the UN Institute for Disarmament Training and Research.

We also received presentations from a number of experts from non-governmental organizations: Amy Smithson (Centre for Strategic and International Studies), Jean Pascal Zanders (Biological Weapons Prevention Project), Michael Krepon (Stimson Center), Olivia Bosch (Chatham House), Pierre Goldschmidt (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), Glenn McDonald (Small Arms Survey), and Mary Wareham (International Campaign to Ban Landmines).

In order to further stimulate discussion, the Chair asked Panel members to consider submitting their own short papers on selected aspects of verification. These internal papers were done in the spirit of analysis and reflection and thus have not been circulated by the Chair.
As UN member states will know, the Secretary-General invited all states who so wished to submit in written form for the Panel’s consideration their views on the subject of verification in all its aspects. The following countries did so: Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Finland, Guatemala, Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, Panama, Portugal, Qatar, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Suriname and Sweden. On behalf of the Panel, I thank them for that.

THE REPORT:

Given the short amount of time available to the Panel, the detailed work of the earlier 1990 and 1995 Reports of the respective Groups of Governmental Experts was not revisited.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the Panel’s work builds on the foundations laid by these two earlier Reports.

What we have sought in our Panel is to focus in particular on “value added”. We have looked at what has changed in the decade in the international security environment and the security needs of states, and how verification has addressed these needs. And how it could in future.

In the light of this approach, the Report is structured “organically”, rather than institution-centric. We have identified and examined themes relating to verification, not the performance of specific treaty regimes.

We did not believe that, as a Panel, it was our job to issue a “report card” or critical evaluation of how well a verification regime was functioning. That is for those with a greater technical expertise than we possessed.

Instead, we have tried to be constructive and forward-looking, identifying areas which should be given greater attention by states in making verification a more useful, effective instrument in addressing states’ security needs.

The Panel also did not try to sit in judgement on issues relating to states’ compliance with specific international treaty obligations or political commitments. The responsibility for this kind of judgement belongs with sovereign states, not with our Panel.
However, this is not to say that the relationship between verification and compliance was neglected. Indeed, the conceptual relationship between the two forms the backbone of the Panel’s approach and draft Report.

During our discussions, certain themes consistently emerged. These included the concept of verification; verification experiences; techniques and methodologies of verification; and the need to build synergies and complementarity among bodies or agencies with responsibilities in the area of monitoring and verification.

Other themes emerged, including capacity-building, both in WMD-related verification and non-WMD (i.e. conventional) verification; the role of the UN; and the contribution of civil society in helping to build capacity for certain kinds of monitoring.

There are four main chapters in the draft Report under the general headings of purpose of verification; evolution of concept of verification in light of developments since 1995; developments in methods, procedures and technologies for the verification of compliance; and, verification and compliance mechanisms.

Each chapter comprises: (a) background, relevant information, facts and figures; (b) issues, concerns and problems that the Panel feels need to be addressed; (c) possible approaches to addressing such issues and concerns; and (d) general recommendations as to the way forward.

It is important that there be clarity in this audience about the nature of the Report’s draft recommendations so as not to raise false expectations.

Our recommendations are not portrayed as quick solutions to all the world’s ills. We do not have a magic wand that, once waved, will somehow “fix” verification for eternity.

Instead, we have started on broad, general foundations, looking to point the way forward, in a practical way, to what states may themselves wish to take up and to work on together.
We did not presume to tell member states of the UN what they should or should not do in the area of verification. That would be prescriptive in the wrong sense.

What the Report tries to do, rather, is develop the basis for a new and widening consensus on the relationship of verification to the security of all states and how its role could be enhanced in contributing to that security.

Verification, as we say in the Report, is a toolbox in which we can put very useful instruments to enhance our security. That is, if states have the will and determination to do so.

LOOKING AHEAD:

After the first session of the Panel, the Chair compiled a draft narrative report, which contained emerging ideas brought out of the Panel’s discussions.

Draft recommendations, based on this initial narrative and on discussions that followed, were presented to members at the completion of the second session. Suggestions and comments were received from Panel members, and the recommendations were reworked in the light of this feedback.

Nearly all of the third session in August was devoted to intense discussion and line-by-line scrutiny of the narrative part of the draft Report and the recommendations.

Unfortunately, on the last day of our meeting and just as we were on the edge of a consensus text – we ran out of time. We needed further discussion on several key points that were very, very close to agreement – but we weren’t quite there yet.

As a result – and with the full support of the Panel members – the Chair brought the meeting to a close “on an interim basis” and undertook to conduct consultations in the weeks to follow to explore the prospect of reaching agreement on the text.
Since then, I have indeed been carrying out consultations – and I am optimistic that we can settle the remaining differences in the near future.

These differences, I would strongly underline, are in the narrative and descriptive parts of the text – and do not touch fundamentally the recommendations we have put forward. They have to do with how much we say about one thing or how little about another.

It is like having the old-fashioned scales in a store, where the shopkeeper first puts the bigger weights on the scales to find the balance. Then, as the balance gets ever closer and ever finer, he adds a pinch here, takes away a leaf or two there. And the balance is found.

So it is with our text at the moment. But that has meant that we have been unable to submit our Report to the First Committee in time for your consideration.

Even if we reach final agreement in the next weeks, which is certainly not out of the question, we may not be able to satisfy the translation and preparation requirements in time.

Despite this, I am both optimistic and confident that we will be able to present our Report to you during the course of the 61st Session of the General Assembly. And it will be, I am equally confident, a Report that reflects the consensus of all the Panel members.

Such a consensus Report would represent an important achievement and be worthy both of your consideration and indeed endorsement as a useful, practical compendium of observations, analysis and recommendations on this key subject of “verification in all its aspects”.

And now I would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the work of the Group of Government Experts on Verification.