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Panel of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on the
“Current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament
and the role of the respective organizations”

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We meet today in a gloomy world with a range of challenges, old and new. Since I covered many of these challenges in my opening statement on 2 October, I will today focus on what the United Nations system is doing to address them, in cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations that work on disarmament and non-proliferation issues.

The system that all of us are currently involved in has been established by nations in the world to serve their common security interests. Specific issues relating to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are the focus of IAEA, OPCW, and CTBTO Preparatory Commission (PrepCom). Other efforts are underway, for example, to control the trade in sensitive technologies or materials needed to make or deliver such weapons.

While there is not yet any global treaty regulating the trade in conventional arms, efforts are underway to strengthen the cooperation among states and organizations that seek to curb the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, to eliminate landmines, and to prohibit certain weapons that states regard as inhumane.

Some of these controls can be advanced through unilateral, bilateral, plurilateral, or regional initiatives. Yet when the goal is to achieve a solution to a problem that is truly global in scope, none of these initiatives will suffice. Something else is needed – something global, something multilateral, and something with legitimacy and legal authority. To deal with such problems, the system has led to the development of a group of focused, intergovernmental organizations.

The need for such organizations arises out of the global scope of the problems posed by certain weapon systems, as well as the political or technical complexity of regulating or eliminating such weapons. No single state, group of states, or organization can solve all of these problems acting alone.

Two such institutions are represented on this panel today – the OPCW and the CTBTO PrepCom – and they are different in many ways. Yet they also have much in common. They seek to promote compliance with certain prohibitions, while also offering assistance and cooperating with governments. Together, they contribute to strengthening the “rule of law” with respect to nuclear and chemical weapons.

The global effort to promote disarmament, however, requires something more than an archipelago of intergovernmental organizations and here is where the United Nations has been able to make its best contributions.

It has many functions, but one of its most important is to promote synergy – to help states and other intergovernmental organizations to solve challenges as effectively as possible on a global scale, by minimizing duplication of efforts, improving information sharing, and reinforcing the basic legitimacy of collective actions to address such threats. Historically, the United Nations provided a solid foundation of diplomatic support for the conclusion of the CWC and CTBT – both were negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament and endorsed by the General Assembly – and many other key multilateral treaties.
In the Secretariat, the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA) continues to serve as a common partner of numerous intergovernmental organizations working in this field and has been working to strengthen this cooperation.

For example, DDA is helping states and a wide variety of organizations to grapple with problems created by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Our assistance is apparent in the administrative and substantive support we provide at international meetings and multilateral negotiations -- such as the last review conference on the Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, the open-ended working group on marking and tracing, as well as in several regional and sub-regional initiatives undertaken by our three UN regional centres, including numerous workshops and training opportunities.

Much of this work has a cross-cutting impact and fosters synergy among many other activities of the United Nations -- in such fields as development, humanitarian assistance, and in addressing the special concerns of women and children. To ensure that the UN's work in this field is both multidisciplinary and coherent, the Secretary-General in 1998 designated the Department for Disarmament Affairs as the focal point for coordinating all action on SALW within the United Nations system. The internal UN mechanism to achieve this goal is called CASA -- Coordinating Action on Small Arms -- which includes representatives from sixteen intergovernmental organizations in the UN system. I encourage your support for this mechanism, which can be instrumental in improving the quality and coordination of UN assistance to Member States.

Together, these efforts have produced some impressive concrete results. Since 2001, DDA has been implementing a project called "The Lima Challenge on Firearms and Ammunition Destruction and Stockpile Management", with activities in several Latin American states. This project has succeeded in destroying some 570,000 small arms and 70 tons of explosives. As public awareness grows over the economic, social, and security implications from the illicit trade in such items, the demand for such projects will continue to grow.

DDA maintains the UN's Register on Conventional Arms and promote usage of the UN's standardized instrument for reporting military expenditures. In the area of landmines, DDA's Geneva branch services key meetings of the parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and cooperates closely with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The Geneva branch similarly assists parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in pursuing the elimination of the inhumane weapons covered by that Convention.

In the nuclear field, we work closely with the International Atomic Energy Agency to promote -- through workshops, seminars, and official statements -- non-proliferation and safeguards objectives, including encouragement of states to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol. We provide substantive and administrative support at the five-year Review Conferences of the NPT and the sessions of its Preparatory Committees.

We are actively involved in promoting disarmament and non-proliferation education, and have worked closely for many years with numerous non-governmental organizations to advance the goals of arms control and disarmament.
We also promote nuclear-weapon-free zones. The recent signature of a treaty creating a Central Asian nuclear-weapon-free zone marks a critical step in the evolution of these zones—it marks the first such zone to be created entirely north of the Equator and covers a large area where many nuclear weapons were once deployed. Our role in promoting such zones is guided both by the 1999 guidelines adopted by the UN Disarmament Commission and by mandates that we are given by states. The next step forward will be for the states in this zone to enter into meaningful negotiations with the nuclear-weapon states to achieve their commitment to the necessary security assurances. I am glad to see the process is underway with 5 nations taking an initiative for such consultations. DDA is prepared to assist in any way to achieve this goal, in accordance with the mandates we are provided.

In the framework of the Secretary-General’s efforts to strengthen cooperation with regional and intergovernmental organizations, DDA leads the “Working Group on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation”. Its recommendations on ways to improve cooperation and coordination were recently approved at the Secretary-General’s Seventh High-Level Meeting with the Heads of Regional and other Intergovernmental Organizations, held on 22 September. Among these recommendations were activities relating to small arms and light weapons, the promotion of disarmament treaties and nuclear-weapon-free zones, and the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540 relating to controls against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including to non-state actors.

Here are some specific examples of how DDA has been working with the institutions on today’s panel:

- The regional centres for Latin America and the Caribbean, and for Asia and the Pacific, have worked with both the CTBTO PrepCom and the OPCW to promote the entry into force of the CTBT and universal membership in the CWC.
- DDA and the CTBTO PrepCom jointly served as the Secretariat for the fourth Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT, held on 21 to 23 September 2005. DDA provided the Secretary of that event.
- The Lima Center has worked with the OPCW to develop an internet-based database called the “Chemical Weapons-Related Assistance and Protection Network”. It has also organized national and regional meetings dealing with national legislation on chemical weapons and their precursors.
- The Asia and Pacific regional centre jointly participated with both treaty organizations in workshops devoted to disarmament and non-proliferation education, which were held in Indonesia and Myanmar.

AREAS FOR FUTURE REFORMS

Today’s world is encountering more new challenges that the founders of the UN did not envisage at the inception of the organization. Given the increasing examples of nuclear non-compliance and the aberrations from NPT norms that have taken place in recent years, I would foresee an even closer relationship between the Security Council and the IAEA, in terms of consultations and information sharing. Because the Security Council is the only mechanism to determine the existence of “any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression”, this should be done—in cases involving WMD—only with the technical
advice of the relevant organizations. But unfortunately we have not had such a mechanism to do such consultations in the past among agencies and organizations concerned with disarmament and non-proliferation. Even between the First Committee and the Conference of Disarmament there is only a perfunctory relationship.

It is true that not every security problem requires a solution based at the United Nations. The problem of anti-personnel landmines is often cited an example of how arms control can advance through agreements reached outside the UN. Strategic nuclear arms control has for years proceeded on such a basis, as have several regional security initiatives.

Yet when such problems are truly global in scope, the case for a coordinated global response becomes all the more compelling, and no organization is better positioned to address such problems on a planetary scale as the United Nations. It has a universal membership, it has a common Charter that is binding upon all its members, and it provides the indispensable common ground for deliberating the many problems of international peace and security. When its member states can unite, the United Nations becomes the world’s largest and potentially most effective “coalition of the willing.” It is this quality that gives the United Nations its continuing relevance in addressing our gravest security threats, and in building a better future for all.