STATEMENT

BY

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ON THE

WORK OF THE ADVISORY BOARD ON
DISARMAMENT MATTERS IN 2006

AT THE

FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK, 18 OCTOBER 2006
Madam Chairperson,
Mr. Under-Secretary-General
Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour and privilege to address the First Committee on the work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters during its 46th and 47th sessions held in February and June 2006 in New York and Geneva, respectively. This is the second time that the Board has reported to the First Committee on its work. It is a timely innovation in the working methods of the Committee that genuinely offers additional opportunity to disseminate more broadly the perspectives of the members of the Board on topical issues in the field of Disarmament and Arms Control. As the Board also constitutes the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), I will make a brief reference to the work of the Institute with particular reference to its programme of work and budget. Indeed, I am pleased to be on the Panel with the Director of the Institute, Dr. Patricia Lewis, who will offer more details on the Institute’s work.

At its two sessions in 2006, the Advisory Board focused its deliberations on four major areas of international concern. First, it undertook an assessment of the situation in the field of disarmament in the light of the failure of the 2005 Summit to reflect issues related to disarmament and non-proliferation in its Outcome Document. Following the analysis by the Board of the threat posed by accessibility of WMDs to non-State actors, a decision was taken to broaden the perspective to include other weapon systems especially conventional arms considering that all types of weapons, without exception, are known to be dangerous in the hands of non-State actors. Consequently, the Board considered measures to prevent the proliferation of weapon systems to non-State actors. Thirdly, it examined the way ahead in building an international security system. Finally, it considered possible ways to consolidate and further develop international norms on small arms and light weapons.

Following its analysis of the discouraging global situation in the field of disarmament as demonstrated by the outcome of the 2005 World Summit, the Board recommended that incremental steps should be taken to build considerable momentum on the priority issues in the areas of WMD-related terrorism, promoting the universality of treaty regimes on WMDs, and early commencement of substantive work at the Conference on Disarmament, including on negotiation of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT).

In this regard, the Board also recommended that Member States should undertake appropriate measures not only to build but also restore trust and confidence among themselves. This could serve as a basis for any disarmament and non-proliferation progress. New thinking aimed at establishing a new international security paradigm should be adopted. Member States should renew their political will to uphold the rule of law and international norms, and to strengthen multilateralism, democracy and an inclusive participatory process in international relations.

With respect to the sensitive political and legal issues that arise when a State withdraws from treaties, the Board suggested that measures be taken to unequivocally discourage withdrawal from the NPT by empowering the IAEA to respond decisively to
non-compliance, pre-empting any misperception that withdrawal from the Treaty is a viable or a consequence-free option.

In the same vein, the Board in broad terms recommended that disarmament and non-proliferation be pursued in a mutually complementary manner, emphasizing the adoption of a balanced approach in addressing the security concerns of all States both at regional and international levels. Specifically, it expressed the need to address the issues of disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses of nuclear energy in a balanced, reasonable and sustainable manner.

The Board also made two practical suggestions regarding the annual United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme. First, it suggested that the scope should include new topics and challenges, such as export controls, national legislation, law enforcement, border controls, illicit trafficking in nuclear materials, information-sharing, preventing trade in, and presence of, black market precursors and agents. It also suggested that efforts be made to encourage donors to increase their financial support for NGO efforts in the fields of disarmament and arms control.

Madam Chairperson,

The Board had in previous sessions addressed the issue of measures to prevent the proliferation of WMDs to non-state actors. This year, it focused on preventing the transfer of conventional weapon systems to non-State actors, which members stressed had become the weapons of choice for terrorists. It identified such weapons as including man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), shorter-range rockets, rocket propelled grenades, anti-tank missiles, mortars, firearms and assault rifles, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The Board noted that it was crucial to place emphasis on efforts aimed at drying up the financial resources of the non-State actors or terrorist groups as a means of blocking their illicit weapons transactions. Eliminating the supply of weapons to terrorists should be pursued assiduously. In this regard, the Board made a number of recommendations.

First among these recommendations is that the United Nations should continue to study the development of international norms governing transfers in conventional arms, including the prohibition of transfer to non-state actors. Second is that Member States should strengthen, in accordance with the international law, all international initiatives aimed at combating international terrorism, especially in the field of possible acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, their precursors, know-how and delivery systems. Thirdly, the mandatory provisions in Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) regarding the elimination of the supply of weapons to terrorists should be strictly applied to all States and the responsibility of States regarding the supply of weapons should continue in the event these weapons are used in terrorist acts. Fourthly, the private sector, in particular the arms industry, should be involved in addressing the threats posed by terrorists. Finally, civilian frameworks and infrastructures must be re-directed to tighten and enhance tools in eliminating the supply of weapons to non-state actors and terrorists. These tools should include national export control legislation, law enforcement, customs, border controls,
greater security of containers, exchange of information and intelligence regarding persons, transfer of funds and transactions, enhanced sensitivity to end-use including post shipment inspections and a range of steps that require greater accounting and physical security of arms storage facilities.

Madam Chairperson,

The Board had a stimulating and wide-ranging discussion on how to build an international security system. Essentially, the discussion focused on how best to strengthen and buttress the existing security system. The Board recognized that current and future security challenges increasingly arose from social, political, religious, ethnic and/or linguistic differences, refugee flows, conflicts over access to natural resources and development-related issues. By their nature, these challenges do not submit to simple military solution. In the history of mankind, peace has been the fruit of justice.

The Board agreed that primacy should continue to be accorded to multilaterally negotiated instruments, with a central role for the United Nations as a universal forum. There was also need for strict adherence to the principles of the UN Charter regarding non-use of force, questions of legality, human rights as well as the recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. In that regard, the reform of the United Nations and the Security Council were considered to be necessary to make both institutions more effective, accountable and indeed representative.

The Board noted that improved mechanisms for peacemaking and peacekeeping had become necessary. There is need to broaden the scope and role of regional mechanisms in order to help resolve security problems. The already existing regional cooperative mechanisms in Europe, Africa and Latin America should be exploited.

In its recommendations on this subject, the Board considered that there was a need for greater use of regional organizations in crisis resolution and further exploration of their relationship with the United Nations. It also believed that the United Nations should adapt its structures in order to be more responsive to the new threats, such as terrorism. For a truly effective multilateral system, there was a need for the United Nations to recognize and better incorporate wider non-proliferation activity consistent with resolution 1540. Finally, it recommended that greater effort should be devoted to making disarmament issues more relevant to a younger generation growing up in the 21st century.

As earlier mentioned, Madam Chairperson, the last major issue considered by the Board this year was the need to consolidate and further develop international norms on small arms and light weapons (SALW). In discussing this issue, the Board recognized the positive efforts that were undertaken at regional and global levels to stem the illicit trade in such weapons. It also recognized that many of the actors in the illicit trade in these weapons were medium-sized States in the developing world, struggling with poverty, illiteracy, disease and poor governance. The international community was better
positioned to craft an appropriate blend of economic, political, social, developmental and other measures to alleviate those deficiencies.

One fundamental problem remains however, and that is how to control the ubiquity of small arms. The most effective solution perhaps, lay in creating a cordon around sensitive areas to prevent arms movement into such regions. As a further disincentive to those involved in small arms trafficking, it was suggested that illicit arms trading could, perhaps, be declared a war crime.

In concluding its deliberations on this subject, the Board proposed the harmonization of national laws on arms brokering within regions in order to prevent arms dealers from arranging transfers in neighbouring states which might be unlawful in their own jurisdictions. It also proposed that donor countries and international institutions should act to support states that lack the resources to implement national laws against small arms trafficking. It called for recognition to be accorded to the role of civil society in combating the illicit trade in SALW. Most significantly, it recommended that clear strategies should be delineated for incorporating global initiatives for the control of illicit SALW into regional cooperation mechanisms.

Madam Chairperson

I would now like to address in brief the Board’s oversight work as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR. I must say from the onset that UNIDIR needs the unflinching support of the Members of the First Committee, quite a number of whom are also represented in the Conference on Disarmament. UNIDIR has established itself for over 25 years as a critical resource for in-depth research and ideas for the international disarmament community. The role of the Board as Board of Trustees for UNIDIR is a core function. It serves UNIDIR well not only as a board for new projects and proposals, but also as a means to forge alliances with governments and other research institutes and for political support when necessary. In consideration of the needs of the Institute, the Advisory Board made a strong recommendation to the Secretary-General urging that the financial subvention to the Board be maintained in order to keep the Institute independent and autonomous in its choice of research activities. The Board reiterated its call for core funding from the United Nations regular budget for the principal posts of the Institute as recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/89.

The Board also believes that the United Nations mandate review process, in particular proposals for the reform of research and training institutes, would have significant impact on the work and functioning of UNIDIR if it fails to take into account the continued contributions of the Institute to the UN system as a whole and to Member States. All efforts should, therefore, be made to support the continued implementation of the Institute’s programme of work. The Advisory Board as the Board of Trustees of the Institute endorsed UNIDIR’s proposals to make the work of UN research institutes more streamlined and cost effective by establishing a network of inter-institute cooperation. In reforming the research and training system under the mandate review process, it is, however, important that the role of the Advisory Board as the Board of Trustees of
UNIDIR should not be diluted in any way, so that it can continue to effectively discharge its oversight responsibilities over the Institute.

The key recommendations of the Advisory Board to the Secretary-General on all issues are contained in his report on the work of the Advisory Board (A/61/297) which I commend to you for a more detailed account of the Board’s deliberations. The report on UNIDIR is contained in document A/61/180. It is our hope that Member States would muster the necessary political will to implement the Board’s recommendations which, I believe, will contribute immensely to the our shared goals of global disarmament and non-proliferation. Let me add in this regard that it is indeed gratifying to me, and I believe to all the members of the Board, to learn that since the Board’s recommendations on FMCT, the Conference on Disarmament has now cleared certain obstacles that will facilitate the commencement of negotiation of that instrument. I urge the CD to sustain the momentum.

Madam Chairperson,

In sum, my experience on the Advisory Board, first as a member and then as the Chairperson, has been most rewarding. The discussions over the two sessions in New York and Geneva were particularly inspiring and fruitful. The discussions among Board Members were held mostly as colleagues and friends, and there was always a genuine desire on their part to cooperate in addressing the tasks before the Board. As you are aware, members of the Board are a blend of current and former government officials, with several academics and researchers, and a representative of a non-governmental organization, all participating in their personal capacities. This arrangement has enabled the Board to benefit optimally from their rich and varied experiences. The character of the Board could be defined as a near-perfect blend of technocrats and practitioners of disarmament. In essence, the Board is a think tank. Herein lies its strength.

To build on this strength, I would like to suggest increasing the participation of non-governmental members including academics, NGOs and indeed journalists. Such a process could expand the range of the Board’s dialogue, viewpoints and experiences as well as greatly enrich its recommendations.

I must not conclude this statement without saying how honoured I feel to have been appointed by the Secretary-General as Chairperson of the Board for 2006. I would like to express appreciation for the support I received from all the members of the Board, from Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Nobuaki Tanaka and the members of his Department, as well as from the Director and staff of UNIDIR. It is my wish to continue to sustain my interest in the activities of the Board in spite of my new responsibilities Foreign Minister of Nigeria.

Thank you for your kind attention.