

Nuclear Weapons and the First Committee

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First let me thank the Chairman for inviting me to address the work of the First Committee on the issue of nuclear weapons. Let me too thank you all for the work that you do here. Since the invention of nuclear weapons, their control and elimination has been intimately and inextricably linked with the prospects for our survival. The efforts that you make here in this room this year, next year, until this problem is solved once and for all, could not be more important. We are at the frontline of this campaign: delegates representing their populations; NGOs providing the voices of civil society; and the United Nations family of organizations whose job it is to assist you in your work. I am sure that every single one of you is aware of what is at stake, of the effects of nuclear weapons and the consequences of their use. This is why we are all working on this issue in good faith, with urgency and on behalf of humanity. This is why we are trying to find ways of making the work of this important committee more effective.

The very first resolution passed by the First Committee of the General Assembly set up the Atomic Energy Commission. The Commission was charged *inter alia* with making specific proposals for the elimination of atomic weapons and all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction and for effective safeguards by way of inspections and other means to protect complying states against the hazards of violations and evasions. This was explicitly set up as a step-by-step process to "proceed in separate stages, the successful completion of each of which will develop the necessary confidence of the world before the next stage is undertaken".

That was 24 January 1946. Then, only one state had developed nuclear weapons and the world was all too aware of their devastating effects. Within the next twenty years, four more states had proliferated and it was felt that it was only a matter of time that twenty or more states would go the same way. But the will of the people stopped that process. Through the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 and the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968, the numbers of states possessing nuclear weapons was kept to five—that is until the second wave of proliferation took place outside the treaty in regions of high tension in the 1970s and 1980s. The third and most recent wave of proliferation, this time within the NPT, began in the late 1980s and continues. Who will be next?

We are clearly at a point in history when we have to think through these things with great care. We need to look at the challenges that face us in terms of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, we need to understand motivations, learn from success stories—we must not forget that there have been several states that have voluntarily given up nuclear weapons or their potential to develop nuclear weapons—and then we need to work out what to do. Not so easy, I know. It is hard to find agreement on priorities but while people fiddle in this room with syntax and symbolism, other people are out there busily acquiring dangerous capabilities and knowledge. One day we could well wake up to the nightmare of widespread possession of nuclear weapons by both states and non-state armed groups and the imminent likelihood of use.

The author would like to acknowledge the useful input she received from colleagues in UNIDIR and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, in particular Randy Rydell.

We need to keep the deliberations of the First Committee rooted in reality and make sure that the words—so hard fought over—lead to practical action.

We must acknowledge, however, that nuclear disarmament resolutions do not receive the full support of all Member States. Even those states that are generally in agreement on the urgency of action on nuclear weapons are often not in agreement over specific language in the resolutions themselves. However, that should not detract from the importance of putting these resolutions into effect. Where consensus does not exist, the will of the states is clearly expressed in the vote. Perhaps we sometimes set too much store in attaining consensus, as it is all too often achieved through weakening the intent and purpose of a resolution. A vote on a stronger resolution may in some cases give a clearer signal as to the will of the international community, and thus may have more value. In any case, for all states that vote in favour of a resolution, the implementation of that resolution should be of the highest priority.

If we look back at the First Committee voting records of the last few years, we can see a clear divergence on nuclear weapons issues. In the last three years, this lack of convergence has remained steady. If the First Committee is a litmus test of international thinking on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, then the environment could be said to be rather caustic. Slight shifts in positions may cause all sorts of excitement in this room—but this means absolutely nothing to the people you are representing in the outside world. The only way the work of the First Committee could have meaning is for it once again to produce results that have an impact in the real world. It has done it in the past; it needs to do it again and now.

So how could we make the First Committee more effective in nuclear weapons issues?

To start with, it could be useful to carry out a nuclear audit on the First Committee: go back through all the nuclear resolutions, go back through all the reports on the implementation and the follow-through of those resolutions and see what effect they have had. This audit could be presented to the First Committee at the sixtieth session next year. It would enable states to assess the progress made by their efforts, think through the way in which First Committee resolutions can be put into action and could help states focus their efforts for increased effectiveness.

Another proposal is to build on the findings reported in Under-Secretary-General Abe's presentation in the interactive debate on implementation and for states to build a follow-up process into their First Committee work as a matter of routine. Some states already do this, simply as a matter of accountability to their citizens, and they produce regular reports to the Secretary-General on their implementation of the resolutions. Other states find it much harder and many states feel they have nothing to report. One way for such states to be able to do this more effectively is to appoint someone as a focal point who would be responsible for collecting information from the relevant national ministries and agencies, collating the information and submitting the report to the Department for Disarmament Affairs in time for the following First Committee.

As part of this process, states could also put forward national plans for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This is not the equivalent of reporting on what has been achieved, rather it is to show what states plan to achieve in forthcoming years. Indeed, inspired by the results-based planning approach that is now put to such good use within the UN Secretariat, states could use the same methodology to plan for the future.

In this vein, it would be useful to begin collective practical preparations for further nuclear weapons reductions leading to global nuclear disarmament. A great deal of important and fruitful effort has been put into the safeguards regime and supporting actions for nuclear non-proliferation over the last decade. We are now reaping the benefits of the Additional Protocol, new technologies, capabilities and access. National laws to prevent the spread of dangerous technologies are being put through legislative bodies in a large number of countries, spurred on by their obligations under the treaties to which they are party and by Security Council resolu-

tion 1540. Other measures and initiatives have been developed to support and underpin the international nuclear non-proliferation legal framework. It is now time to put the same degree of effort into preparing for the eventuality of nuclear disarmament.

There is a wealth of experience in a number of Member States on the practical realities of nuclear weapons reduction: from warhead and missile dismantlement and destruction to verification of these processes and related elimination of support systems and facilities. For example, the United States and the Russian Federation have a vast shared experience and technical expertise on nuclear weapons reductions and de-alerting measures that they could share with other states in the First Committee. Another example is the work of the United Kingdom on verifying nuclear warhead dismantlement. There are many other examples of such expertise belonging to states that possess nuclear weapons and to states that do not. Perhaps next year at the First Committee an interactive discussion could be dedicated to addressing the practical problems of nuclear weapons dismantlement and how to solve them. States that possess such technical expertise could volunteer experts to address the First Committee. It would be useful to identify the problems that have been solved and the problems that have yet to find a satisfactory solution so that experts from all over the world could put their brains to work on addressing remaining problems. Future First Committees could specifically address the problems that were deemed to need further attention and monitor progress in the efforts to address them.

It was Oscar Wilde who wrote that the one person who has more illusions than the dreamer is the man of action. Please indulge me in my delusions of practical reality. The dream of a nuclear-weapon-free world could become a reality if—but only if—we first believe in it and then take the practical steps to achieve it. The First Committee could play its part by preparing the ground and moving the debate along as actions become politically and technically possible.

Certainly we at UNIDIR, and within the UN Secretariat, as well as a large number of non-governmental organizations, research institutes and think tanks are ready and willing to assist in any way that we could be useful. I hope that these ideas have found some resonance and will stimulate your responses.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.