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Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session

Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report outlines a series of recommendations in response to the Secretary-General's request that the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters consider a new vision and new approaches for nuclear disarmament and arms control. In light of the current fraught geo-strategic context, the Board's proposals encourage States to talk, and to identify common goals, language and practices that could result in nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament; for the United Nations to play a decisive role in creating an enabling environment; and for the global public to be robustly engaged. Over a period of two years, the Board actively explored what clear, realistic goals could elicit the best contributions by stakeholders towards proactive action, in both the intermediate and longer term.

Nuclear weapons continue to pose an existential threat to the world and, as such, the Board underscored that the international community must continue to focus its collective efforts on specific steps, rooted in a renewed common and shared vision, that would achieve the ultimate goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world in a manner that is verifiable, irreversible and transparent. The Board was equally convinced that biological and chemical weapons demand urgent action.

The Board believed that a credible and achievable way forward would build on the existing, decades-long system of disarmament and arms control measures in order to: (a) preserve and reinforce existing treaties and agreements; (b) sustain and strengthen the norm against the testing, proliferation and use of nuclear weapons; (c) reduce the role of nuclear weapons as instruments of statecraft; (d) address the risks and spillover effects of various technological innovations in heightening nuclear dangers; (e) consider new and emerging technologies and potential new domains of conflict, including their potential interactions with nuclear weapons; (f) increase opportunities for effective bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral dialogue; and

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(g) promote verifiable and irreversible action towards nuclear, chemical and biological weapons disarmament.

Advancing these goals, the Board believed, requires a diverse and modern diplomatic toolkit, comprised of various formal and informal actions, pursued simultaneously across official and unofficial channels, including with numerous civil society stakeholders. Renewed political dedication and robust leadership are needed, alongside a convincing narrative to both heighten global public awareness around the continued dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction and to mobilize support on their elimination.

In its capacity as the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the Board received targeted overviews on three UNIDIR workstreams: nuclear disarmament, nuclear deterrence and strategic arms control dialogue; activities in support of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and Their Destruction; and disarmament and the women and peace and security agenda. The Board also reviewed current programmes, activities and finances of the Institute, including ongoing efforts to strengthen its policy impact, achieve financial sustainability and further expand its global engagement. The Board approved the report of the Director on the activities of the Institute for the period from January 2020 to December 2020 and the proposed programme of work and financial plan for 2022.

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held its deliberations for 2021 through videoconferencing, convening for its seventy-fifth session on 4, 9 and 11 February and for its seventy-sixth session on 8, 10, 15, 17 and 29 June. Selma Ashipala-Musavyi (Namibia) presided as Chair over both sessions.

2. Beginning in January 2020, the Advisory Board undertook a two-year programme of work based on the request of the Secretary-General to consider a new vision and new approaches for nuclear disarmament and arms control. Specifically, the Secretary-General asked the members of the Board to tackle three main questions: (a) how to reduce siloed approaches and create a shared understanding about the destabilizing nexus of rapidly developing new technologies, including those in possible new domains of conflict, with nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction; (b) how to mobilize the support of Member States to reinvigorate nuclear disarmament and arms control, especially in the current challenging international climate; and (c) how to ensure that the actions of the United Nations system enable the development of creative, yet realistically achievable, new approaches to the common goal of nuclear disarmament.

3. In 2020, the Board produced a preliminary report on the above topics ([A/75/283](#)) based on two sessions of substantive discussion. The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [38/183](#) (O), summarizes the deliberations of the Board during the past four sessions and presents the Board's specific recommendations to the Secretary-General. It also describes the work of the Board in its capacity as the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), including its approval of the report of the Institute's Director ([A/76/175](#)).

II. Substantive discussions and recommendations

4. Three years ago, the Secretary-General, in *Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, underscored the key role of disarmament in safeguarding humanity and saving lives. That agenda remains relevant and urgent. The Board appreciates that several Member States have stepped forward to champion or support one or more of the Agenda's 40 detailed commitments on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, in collaboration with United Nations entities.

5. However, these collaborative actions stand in sharp contrast to the continued fraying and further atrophying of disarmament instruments, machinery and institutions with worrying consequences. These developments reflect broader divisions and tensions between and among States. The Board felt strongly that such cleavages must not be allowed to prevent international cooperation on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament or efforts that advance respect for and adherence to international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

6. In considering a new vision for nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, the Board actively explored what clear, realistic goals could elicit the best contributions of key stakeholders towards proactive action, in both the intermediate and longer term.

7. The Board heard presentations from experts on non-proliferation and disarmament, on new and emerging technologies and on how to draw on the experience of global responses derived from the climate change movement, including ways that movement had generated enhanced public engagement. It discussed these topics with a view to developing practical and concrete suggestions and

recommendations for bringing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons disarmament and arms control back to the heart of common efforts to strengthen international peace and security and sustainable development.

A. Risks and opportunities in a changing global security environment

State of affairs and associated risks

8. The Advisory Board observed with concern that the current international security environment continues to be marked by an absence of trust, diminishing transparency, growing trends of competition over cooperation and a lack of dialogue. The last two decades have been characterized by the intensification of global and regional political-military fault lines that risk undermining progress made in the period immediately following the cold war, including widening divergences among States over fulfilling legally binding obligations relevant to advancing efforts on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament and the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. All opportunities should be sought to foster comprehensive and cooperative security.

9. The Board noted that despite isolated instances of progress on the path towards nuclear arms control and disarmament in the current multipolar context, the overall momentum appears to be regressing alarmingly. Significant recent signs of reversal have included the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles; the breakdown of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe; and the possible collapse of the Treaty on Open Skies, on top of the breakdown of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems. Members also noted that 25 years after the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, it has not yet entered into force. Members further expressed deep concern about the re-emergence of dangerous rhetoric and practices among States about the utility of nuclear weapons, including on their use.

10. The Advisory Board was equally convinced that biological and chemical weapons demand urgent action. As the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has underscored, infectious disease outbreaks have the ability to bring the world to a virtual standstill, cripple economies, undermine global security and cause untold human suffering and loss of life. The Secretary-General has highlighted to the Security Council that the weaknesses and lack of preparedness exposed by this pandemic provide a window onto how a bioterrorist attack might unfold, and may increase its risks. Those risks are exacerbated by the current absence of compliance and verification, as well as of transparency measures and robust institutional support for the Biological Weapons Convention. Moreover, as chemical weapons are the most widely proliferated and used weapon of mass destruction in history, the Board stressed the urgent need for tangible and practical steps to uphold the authority and integrity of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction in order to achieve the total elimination of such weapons, and to exclude their use through the strict implementation of all its provisions.

11. The Board observed that, after the cold war, any broad public understanding about the need and value of nuclear non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament and risk reduction appeared to fade within the public consciousness. Meanwhile, within some relevant State institutions, there are often questions about the role of arms control and disarmament in improving mutual security and international stability. In this context, consensus-based multilateral disarmament negotiations have

been deadlocked for more than two decades, while bilateral negotiating channels have been allowed to stagnate, or to remain comparatively nascent.

12. The Board reflected that the current level of geopolitical tensions and distrust are driving military modernization and expansion efforts, fuelling a deeply concerning dynamic.

13. The Board also noted that, while advances in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, outer space and nuclear, biological and chemical science could contribute to progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and potentially reduce nuclear, chemical and biological risks if used properly in the realm of their peaceful intent, they could also worsen existing security risks, create additional dangers and open new domains for conflict. Mismanagement of such technological developments, or of rapidly evolving offensive and defensive missile technologies, could diminish predictability and mutual trust, contribute to arms races and even produce a rapid escalation in the use of force, potentially leading to the use of nuclear weapons, including inadvertently or through miscalculation.

14. Taken together, these overlapping factors have created a combustible international setting where our common security, as well as that of the key protagonists, is increasingly challenged and under growing threat.

Potential opportunities

15. Focusing on nuclear arms control and disarmament, the Board considered several developments that could contribute to improving the international security climate.

16. The Board welcomed the recent five-year extension of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty), regarding this agreement as important both for global strategic stability and for future opportunities to reinforce existing arms control and disarmament regimes, especially by the United States and the Russian Federation. It also took note of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which reflects its parties' commitment to achieving the total elimination of nuclear weapons. In this context, the Board recalled that the Treaty had its origins in the renewed consideration by States of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, as well as a widely held frustration with the slow pace of nuclear disarmament and the implementation of non-proliferation and disarmament commitments.

17. The Board welcomed the reaffirmation by the Russian Federation and the United States and by China and the Russian Federation of the Reagan-Gorbachev principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

18. The Board observed that other prominent issues of global concern, including the climate change crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, may provide important opportunities to increase public awareness and understanding of disarmament-related issues. For example, the pandemic and the climate crisis each could be used to promote serious debate on: (a) the constituent elements of the concept of "human security"; and (b) practical means for States to apply a broadened definition of security that highlights the broader costs of military and arms competition.

19. While noting that it was still too early to identify all the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, Board members described it as a wake-up call to improve preparedness, international cooperation and transparency, not only for future health-related crises, but also for other challenges and catastrophes. In this regard, also noting that the pandemic had underscored the direct and indirect costs of biosecurity and biosafety incidents, the Board underlined the critical importance of revitalizing

activities within the framework of the Biological Weapons Convention and on strengthening the implementation of the Convention, including through the development of potential verification and transparency measures.

B. Goals for contemporary nuclear disarmament and arms control

20. The Board welcomed the opportunity to consider ways to revitalize and modernize the global disarmament architecture and the United Nations disarmament machinery, both to address the dangers and risks associated with the continued existence of nuclear weapons and to chart a course towards their total elimination. An intermediate objective would be to support a global security environment that is more stable and secure in the near term with reduced nuclear risks and where constructive actions enable a revitalized pursuit of nuclear disarmament.

21. Reaffirming that nuclear weapons continue to pose an existential threat to the world, the Board underscored that the international community must continue to focus its collective efforts on specific steps, rooted in a renewed common and shared vision, for the ultimate goal of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world in a manner that is verifiable, irreversible and transparent.

22. The Board underlined the shared interest of all Member States to pursue cooperative action in international non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament in order to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, whether intentionally, by accident or through miscalculation, and to avoid the severe consequences that may ensue from it. The necessity to avert such risks should provide the foundation for the political will needed to pursue further progress in that area.

23. A credible and achievable way forward would build on the existing decades-long system of disarmament and arms control measures so as to: (a) preserve and reinforce existing treaties and agreements; (b) sustain and strengthen the norm against the testing, proliferation and use of nuclear weapons; (c) reduce the role of nuclear weapons as instruments of statecraft; (d) address the risks and spillover effects of various technological innovations in heightening nuclear dangers; (e) consider new and emerging technologies and potential new domains of conflict, including their potential interactions with nuclear weapons; (f) increase opportunities for effective bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral dialogue; and (g) promote verifiable and irreversible action towards nuclear, chemical and biological weapons disarmament.

24. In considering how to develop a cooperative global security regime, the Board underscored the need for a diverse and modern diplomatic toolkit capable of addressing tensions between States; re-establishing habits of dialogue and cooperation; significantly enhancing transparency; building and sustaining mutual trust and confidence; refraining from strategic nuclear competition; and fostering reduced reliance on nuclear weapons in national security doctrines, postures and policies. In plain terms, the Board saw the need for States to talk; for them to identify common goals, language and practices; and for the public to be robustly engaged.

25. Such a toolkit would be designed to: (a) identify major strategic concerns driving today's competitive relationships, as well as their constituent parts; and (b) match them with appropriate methods of response, with a view to tackling multiple concerns in tandem. Where appropriate, identifying and responding to one particular element of a broader strategic concern could allow an initiative's scope to be narrowed to a clear set of realistic deliverables.

26. Advancing these goals, the Board believes, will require various formal and informal actions along the lines of those suggested under the section on key points and recommendations below. Such actions would require simultaneous engagement

across official and unofficial channels, including to gain insights and support from civil society stakeholders. The need to consider various formats and avenues for discussion and action is particularly notable in view of the difficult current negotiating environment, including the entrenched deadlock within the intergovernmental disarmament machinery.

C. Strategies to support nuclear disarmament and arms control

27. The following paragraphs set out some key propositions and findings from the Board's deliberations. Together, they comprise elements of an agenda for collaborative action by all Member States and civil society to reduce the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and revitalize pursuit of a world free of these weapons.

Action to mobilize the support of Member States to reinvigorate the pursuit of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

Key points and recommendations

28. As a first and urgent priority, the international community must preserve and renew the existing system of bilateral and multilateral measures, agreements and treaties for non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, built over generations, to both lessen the likelihood of nuclear war and build on this foundation for the pursuit of the ultimate elimination of nuclear weapons. This means they must be implemented in full and in a verifiable and transparent manner.

29. Preserving and fortifying the existing non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament architecture is the essential foundation for recrafting pertinent strategies to reflect the realities, challenges and dynamics of today's world. The Board noted that the Russian Federation and the United States together hold the vast majority of the world's strategic nuclear weapons and have not exhausted their options for pursuing further bilateral reductions. At the same time, global multipolarity makes it necessary that all States, including nuclear-weapon States, engage in effective dialogue on how to: (a) refrain from competition in the strategic security arena and reduce nuclear dangers; and (b) adopt arms control and disarmament actions that will return States to a common path to a world free of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

30. The United States and the Russian Federation, as well as other parties to the Treaty on Open Skies, should endeavour to preserve the Treaty, building on the successful five-year extension of the New START Treaty by the Russian Federation and the United States. The Board emphasized the importance of ensuring the success of the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, believing a positive outcome to be in the interest of all States parties. Furthermore, States should join and fully support a collective global effort to sustain other non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament treaties, such as the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention. It further stressed that States should take full advantage of other near-term milestones for renewed multilateral dialogue and concrete deliverables, notably the forthcoming review conferences for the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and the Biological Weapons Convention. Board members also pointed to the urgent need to strengthen institutional support for these and other treaties. The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which is long overdue, would represent an important concrete step both to

reaffirm the importance of the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament architecture and to build political momentum to strengthen it further.

31. Given the tense international security environment, the Board underscored the need for risk reduction measures, which should include actions to demonstrate nuclear restraint, renew or strengthen robust and action-oriented bilateral and multiparty dialogues to that end, reduce the likelihood of conventional conflict and improve transparency and verification methodologies. All States should equally maintain and advocate the moratorium on nuclear tests pending a successful effort to achieve the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty's entry into force and support sustained and practical efforts to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. All States should also cooperate to ensure compliance with the legal obligation not to use chemical and biological weapons.

32. Strengthened official and unofficial dialogue, including as a means to increase transparency among relevant States, is essential. It should include dialogue on the size, make-up and management of nuclear arsenals, as well as on related future plans. In addition, such dialogue would contribute towards a better shared understanding of national doctrines and decision-making processes, both among nuclear-weapon States and vis-à-vis the broader international community. In particular, establishing clear channels of communication in the event of contingencies that could lead to nuclear-weapons use could help prevent miscalculation by adversaries, while also building accountability and mutual confidence.

33. In addition, the Board noted that both traditional and innovative confidence-building measures must be a key element of efforts to rebuild trust, as well as to reduce and mitigate risks. In that regard, the Board saw merit in potential initiatives by States or other actors to achieve limited successes in revitalizing cooperative security action. It also encouraged initiatives that expand and open communication channels at bilateral, regional, plurilateral and multilateral levels, with a view to pursuing simultaneous and overlapping dialogues as necessary, including, for example, efforts that are under way towards the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

34. In this connection, the Board is of the view that renewed, sustained and substantive dialogues among and between nuclear-weapon States, at multiple levels, is essential to rebuild cooperation, mutual trust and confidence, maintain strategic stability and promote meaningful strategic risk reduction. Such discussions, the Board noted, could address each party's respective strategic concerns relating to nuclear weapons and associated concerns, such as conventional weapons, missile defences and issues related to novel and emerging technologies, including activities in cyberspace and outer space, and their respective and combined potential impact on strategic stability.

35. With regard to the dialogue among nuclear-weapon States within the P5 process, the Board noted that:

(a) Nuclear-weapon States should expand their discussions to address and agree to measures to promote a better understanding of perceptions and postures, reduce strategic risks and enhance confidence and cooperation;

(b) Nuclear-weapon States should update their discussions to increase transparency and incorporate a more discernible action-oriented approach;

(c) Nuclear-weapon States should demonstrate their leadership in maintaining and enhancing the regime under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, including by advancing efforts to ascertain their and Member States' compliance and fully implementing their disarmament obligations under article VI of the Treaty and past commitments;

(d) Nuclear-weapon States should enhance the transparency of their dialogue and foster interaction with non-nuclear weapon States on the results achieved.

36. The Board noted that in their dialogues States should commit themselves to solving or moving past legacy issues in order to address forward-looking topics as part of a broad, encompassing, twenty-first-century disarmament and arms control agenda. With numerous arms control concerns vying for urgent action, States should seek to address and minimize risks from the full spectrum of strategic concerns, not just nuclear weaponry. This includes the impact of new and evolving military technologies (e.g. advanced conventional weapons, missile defence and electronic warfare), and expanding competition in new domains (e.g. artificial intelligence, outer space and cyberspace), including the nexus between novel technologies and nuclear weapons. Depending on the particular technology focus and domain, these dialogues should include many other States, for example in relation to activities in outer space and cyberspace and those related to verification and risk reduction. These other States need to be actively involved in efforts to regulate such areas.

37. This set of bilateral, plurilateral, regional and multilateral dialogues could pave the way for future disarmament and arms control actions. Those actions could take the shape of legally binding bilateral or multilateral treaties with detailed verification provisions where such agreements are appropriate, but many alternative options exist. For example, States could pursue informal agreements that are politically but not legally binding for their parties, or unilateral actions taken with an expectation of reciprocity, whether or not they are done in coordination with other States. Additional approaches could include joint declarations; bilateral, multiparty and multilateral codes of conduct and rules of the road; and transparency measures. Other tools could include informal dialogues between Member States and experts (potentially initiated by the Secretary-General) as well as groups of governmental experts and expert working groups. The Board noted that the most suitable format and shape of a particular initiative would depend on what issues are on the table as well as the particular negotiating partners. The Board also noted the potential to pursue packages of multiple measures simultaneously.

38. Board members further underlined the importance of making full use of existing mechanisms, such as the First Committee of the General Assembly and the Conference on Disarmament. Noting the past achievements of the Conference, members expressed a firm desire to see it again pursue negotiations on nuclear disarmament and other issues of strategic stability, and therefore reemphasized the importance of members of the Conference exercising the necessary political will and flexibility to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

Action to ensure that the actions of the Secretary-General enable the development of new approaches to achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world

Key points and recommendations

39. As it has been since its founding, the whole United Nations system, led by the Secretary-General, must remain steadfast in its support for the ultimate global elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and must integrate disarmament across its priorities. The Board, mindful of the robust actions outlined in *Securing Our Common Future*, touched during its deliberations on additional steps the United Nations system could undertake to enable the development of new approaches to achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.

40. The Board highlighted that it was indispensable that the Secretary-General robustly continue to promote and defend the vision of a nuclear-weapon-free world. It expressed its belief that the Secretary-General could use his good offices to further support and amplify the norm against the use of nuclear weapons. It also expressed

its belief that the Secretary-General could productively advocate reducing the role of nuclear weapons in national security doctrines.

41. The Board recommended that the Secretary-General continue to encourage strengthened dialogue, particularly among relevant States, and offer his good offices with a view to facilitating informal dialogues to build trust and common understanding. The Board noted past meetings of the Security Council devoted to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, and in this regard the Secretary-General could encourage members of the Council to consider a dedicated discussion on reducing the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and identifying potential ways forward.

42. The Board proposed that the Secretary-General stimulate a global multi-stakeholder conversation about what a sustainable and secure world without nuclear weapons could look like.

43. The Board recommended that the Secretary-General promote and facilitate engagement among Member States to help shape new thinking on ways forward that meet the challenges of today's world with regard to the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Action to address interlinkages across key technology domains (cyberspace, outer space and others) that affect international security, in particular with regard to nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

Key points and recommendations

44. As part of a new vision to advance nuclear disarmament and arms control, States should develop the habit of discussing strategic issues across varied formats and forums so as to help break down silos between individual arms control concerns and maximize the opportunity for solutions. The Board noted that, as of yet, no intergovernmental process has addressed concerns about how technological innovations could potentially increase the risks of the use of nuclear weapons.

45. Noting the contributions of ongoing intergovernmental initiatives for addressing challenges posed in particular areas, such as cybersecurity, outer space and lethal autonomous weapon systems, the Board underscored the strong necessity of promoting a better understanding of the interlinkages between evolving technological capabilities and emerging challenges across a wide range of arms control issues, and risks of the use of nuclear weapons in particular. A comprehensive review of how nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities are becoming increasingly entangled would enable States and other stakeholders to develop practical ways to mitigate the resultant intersection risks. A group of governmental experts on such a matter and/or a report by the Secretary-General could greatly contribute in this regard.

46. The Board felt there were some areas where States could take more immediate actions to mitigate risks of miscalculations or misunderstandings, such as agreements on non-interference in nuclear command, control and communications systems. States could also take appropriate unilateral actions to ensure there are no unauthorized, inadvertent or accidental operational decisions with respect to control of nuclear weapons.

47. The Board noted that any successful effort to reinvigorate the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and arms control must include new and different official, semi-official and civil society voices. Bearing in mind the intergovernmental nature of multilateral/international negotiations and related actions due to the primary role of states to maintain international peace and security and safeguard State sovereignty and national security, the Board noted that, nevertheless, historically, participation from civil society, including from women's organizations, had been vital in helping to create incentives and pressures for action. Looking forward, the Board noted that the United Nations system could consider wide-ranging options to intensify and

sustain dialogue among legal experts, policymakers, technologists and other non-State stakeholders on issues related to new technologies, including the full and equal participation of women, with a view to identifying creative approaches to address new challenges.

Action to mobilize public participation and support for decisive action on non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction

Key points and recommendations

48. The Board stressed that revitalizing the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction requires renewed political dedication and robust leadership. A convincing narrative on nuclear disarmament efforts is also needed, one that would both heighten public awareness and mobilize public support for decisive political action. This narrative could include an appeal to political leaders and government officials to think of themselves also as global citizens, underscoring that the risks and consequences of their actions, including reliance on nuclear weapons, have worldwide ramifications. Here, the Board noted that the United Nations should seek out and take advantage of advice from and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including academia, the media, civil society organizations, the Women and Peace and Security Focal Points Network, youth groups, think tanks and others, including the private sector. It would also benefit from speaking with communities directly affected by such weapons.

49. The Board suggested that the Secretary-General appoint a special envoy for disarmament and civil society, reporting to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, who would engage with civil society, the public at large and other critical stakeholders with a view to giving prominence to the issues of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament.

50. The Board recommended that the Secretary-General and the Office for Disarmament Affairs expand on their efforts to generate greater awareness and understanding among the wider public by engaging in targeted public outreach, including through convening periodic informal gatherings and disarmament education.

III. Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

51. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, acting in its role as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR, met twice in 2021, on 2 February and 17 June. Both meetings were conducted virtually owing to the ongoing pandemic. At those meetings, the officer-in-charge, Giacomo Persi Paoli, in February 2021, and the Institute's new Director, Robin Geiss, in June 2021, briefed the Board on the implementation of the Institute's activities.

52. During its meeting in February 2021, the Board commended UNIDIR for its performance in 2020, the year that marked the Institute's fortieth anniversary. In particular, the Board noted that despite the significant disruptions caused by the pandemic, UNIDIR had issued a record-breaking number of publications (52) and hosted 48 events, with some 7,600 participants taking part in the Institute's activities. Trustees welcomed the enhanced visibility of UNIDIR and its improved online engagement. This included a significant improvement in its number of website users (up 75 per cent) and social media followers (up 35 per cent) globally. The Board emphasized the importance of and expressed support for the Institute's efforts to deliver on its mandate while effectively supporting the health and well-being of its

personnel. The Institute's performance during the pandemic had demonstrated its strength, adaptability and resilience.

53. Trustees recognized the importance of the unique convening role of UNIDIR in supporting multilateral disarmament and encouraged the Institute to continue its efforts to facilitate dialogue and generate ideas. The Board welcomed the Institute's efforts to engage with audiences and to identify new research opportunities beyond Geneva, as well as the translation of research products into other United Nations official languages, and noted the upcoming establishment of the New York liaison presence. The Board encouraged the Institute to further leverage partnerships and researchers based in local settings for its applied research during the ongoing pandemic. It also encouraged the Institute to consider how the Institute's business model might change in the long term as a result of the pandemic, especially in terms of travel and events. The Board recommended that the Institute continue to invest in efforts to measurably track, monitor and assess the impact of its work, including working towards a harmonized set of impact-related indicators across the programmes.

54. The Board noted the continued improvement in the financial situation of UNIDIR. The Institute's income had increased to \$6.8 million in 2020, while its expenditures had increased to \$6.0 million at the time of presentation. The Board also noted the Institute's revised 2021 expenditure projections. Efforts by UNIDIR to diversify its donor base, including through outreach to the private sector and foundations, were noted. The Board recalled its desire to receive financial information in advance of its meetings to support constructive engagement.

55. The Board welcomed the General Assembly's recent resolution on UNIDIR (resolution [75/82](#)) and notably its invitation to the Secretary-General to submit, in the context of the 2022 programme budget, a proposal for an increase in the subvention to the Institute. The Board reiterated its longstanding recommendation that the Institute's subvention be increased proportionate to its contemporary requirements and in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report of July 2018 ([A/73/284](#)). The Board also welcomed the Assembly's appeal to all Member States to continue to make financial contributions to the Institute, if possible for multiple years and unearmarked, so as to contribute to the Institute's viability, independence and impartiality and the quality of its work over the long term. In line with its own previous recommendation ([A/75/283](#)), the Board welcomed the Assembly's recent request for, and the Secretary-General's subsequent efforts to provide, accommodation for the Institute in the Palais des Nations in Geneva at a reduced rate established to cover operational expenses only.

56. The Board supported the Institute's intention to re-establish the position of Deputy Director (D-1) in 2021, given its current size and scale of activities, through savings arising from the abolition of two P-5 posts (Chief of Operations, and Chief of Research).

57. The Board endorsed the broad research priorities of UNIDIR for 2021 and looked forward to the development of a new multi-year strategic plan as proposed by the Director. In the area of conventional weapons, these included strengthening policy and practice on weapon and ammunition management, adapting conventional arms control to changes in conventional warfare, and preventing and mitigating armed violence in urban and local settings. In the area of gender and disarmament, the Institute will investigate gender approaches to cybersecurity, including topics related to women in the cyberworkforce, online harassment, gender-sensitive capacity-building and fairness in artificial intelligence systems, while also identifying entry points for gender mainstreaming and for improving women's participation in weapon and ammunition management. With respect to the Middle East weapons of mass destruction free zone project, priorities included addressing related research gaps,

developing more capacity for future negotiations and continuing to foster regional dialogue. On security and technology, UNIDIR would facilitate the implementation of cybernorms and strengthen cyber crisis management mechanisms, explore the implications of increasing the use of autonomy in weapons systems and other military applications and support a better understanding of the challenge and opportunities of innovation with a specific focus on digital destabilization. Finally, in the area of weapons of mass destruction and other strategic weapons, the Institute's priorities included examining the future of arms control and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, reducing strategic unpredictability, strengthening compliance enforcement, enhancing nuclear transparency and verification and advancing space security and sustainability.

58. In view of the limited time, the Board received targeted overviews on three UNIDIR workstreams: nuclear disarmament, nuclear deterrence and strategic arms control dialogue; activities in support of the Biological Weapons Convention; and disarmament and the women and peace and security agenda. The Board welcomed the work of UNIDIR on the nuclear disarmament, nuclear deterrence and strategic arms control dialogue. Immediate priorities for the programme included the identification of opportunities to recraft strategic arms control and revitalize the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. The Board commended the work of UNIDIR in support of the Biological Weapons Convention, which aimed to stimulate thinking around options and opportunities for States parties to consider in seeking to strengthen this important disarmament treaty at its ninth Review Conference. The Board expressed its continued support for the work of UNIDIR to strengthen synergies between disarmament and the women and peace and security agenda. In 2021, the gender and disarmament programme will facilitate dialogue on the means and benefits of integrating weapons governance into the women and peace and security agenda and will identify best practices that connect disarmament with the agenda's priority themes. The programme will work with Member States and stakeholders to foster collaboration between different parts of the multilateral system, ensuring that relevant treaties and conventions deliver for all.

59. At its meeting held in June 2021, the Board considered and approved the proposed programme of work and financial plan for 2022 (see [A/75/134](#)), including on the basis of comments and recommendations on the proposed budget from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The Board welcomed the new UNIDIR Director, Robin Geiss, who joined the Institute in April 2021, as well as the report of the Director, which provided a thorough account of the Institute's activity in 2020. It noted with the appreciation the work done by the former Director, Renata Dwan. The Board also took note of the initial impressions and planned short term priorities of the new Director, including the recruitment process for the Deputy Director, further strengthening of the Institute's digital communications capacities and the launch of the UNIDIR liaison presence in New York.

60. On communications, Board members commended the Institute's recent efforts, in particular its success throughout the pandemic, and supported the Institute's plans to strengthen digital communications. In this respect, Trustees suggested leveraging existing capacities within the United Nations system, including to keep operating costs at a minimum. In addition, the Institute was advised to consider how it might ensure that its communications remained accessible to all audiences, including those with disabilities.

61. The Director announced that the New York liaison presence had recently been established, and was expected to deepen knowledge, partnerships and opportunities for resource mobilization. The small capacity consisted of one Liaison Officer at the P-4 level based in New York. The officer was already meeting with officials in New York,

in line with existing COVID-19 restrictions. Trustees reiterated the need for UNIDIR to develop clear impact metrics in order to effectively assess the new position.

62. With regard to the Secretary-General's proposal for an increase in the subvention to the Institute in the context of the 2022 programme budget, considering its long-standing recommendation to increase the Institute's subvention in proportion to its contemporary requirements, the Board strongly supported the Secretary-General's proposal for a modest increase of \$364,900.

63. Moving forward, Trustees reiterated their earlier appreciation, expressed in February 2021, of the Institute's efforts to engage with broader and more diverse audiences globally, including the public and youth. Those efforts should continue, including through strengthened communication and education, training and capacity-building initiatives. With regard to youth more specifically, UNIDIR was encouraged to consider a range of different engagement initiatives, including those tailored to youth in different regions. The Institute's continued efforts to translate research products into other United Nations official languages, including Arabic, were commended. The Board reiterated its support for the Institute's initiatives to enhance diversity in research expertise through, inter alia, arrangements with visiting researchers, non-resident fellows and paid graduate professionals. In addition, Trustees encouraged the Institute to consider developing foresight and strategic gaming capacities, as well as research on the nexus between arms control and economic development. Finally, Board members reiterated the need for the Institute to strengthen its resource mobilization efforts, in order to equip itself with the funding basis necessary to maintain and further expand its scope and impact.
