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Address to the East-West Institute: "The United Nations and Security in a Nuclear-Weapon-Free world"

Ban Ki-moon



Some doubt that the problem of WMD terrorism can ever be solved. But if there is real, verified progress in disarmament, the ability to eliminate this threat will grow exponentially.

Mr. John Edwin Mroz, President and CEO of the East-West Institute,

Mr. George Russell, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the East-West Institute.

Dr. Kissinger,

Dr. ElBaradei,

Mr. Duarte,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to the United Nations. I salute the East-West Institute and its partner non-governmental groups for organizing this event on weapons of mass destruction and disarmament.

This is one of the gravest challenges facing international peace and security. So I thank the East-West Institute for its timely and important new global initiative to build consensus. Under the leadership of George Russell and Martti Ahtisaari, the East-West Institute is challenging each of us to rethink our international security priorities in order to get things moving again. You know, as we do, that we need specific actions, not just words. As your slogan so aptly puts it, you are a "think and do tank".

One of my priorities as Secretary-General is to promote global goods and remedies to challenges that do not respect borders. A world free of nuclear weapons would be a global public good of the highest order, and will be the focus of my remarks today. I will speak mainly about nuclear weapons because of their unique dangers

and the lack of any treaty outlawing them. But we must also work for a world free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Some of my interest in this subject stems from my own personal experience. As I come from [the Republic of] Korea, my country has suffered the ravages of conventional war and faced threats from nuclear weapons and other WMD. But of course, such threats are not unique to my country.

Today, there is support throughout the world for the view that nuclear weapons should never again be used because of their indiscriminate effects, their impact on the environment and their profound implications for regional and global security. Some call this the nuclear “taboo”.

Yet nuclear disarmament has remained only an aspiration, rather than a reality. This forces us to ask whether a taboo merely on the use of such weapons is sufficient.

States make the key decisions in this field. But the United Nations has important roles to play. We provide a central forum where states can agree on norms to serve their common interests. We analyze, educate and advocate in the pursuit of agreed goals.

Moreover, we have pursued general and complete disarmament for so long that it has become part of the Organization's very identity. Disarmament and the regulation of armaments are found in the Charter. The very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, in London in 1946, called for eliminating “weapons adaptable to mass destruction”. These goals have been supported by every Secretary-General. They have been the subject of hundreds of General Assembly resolutions, and have been endorsed repeatedly by all our Member States.

And for good reason. Nuclear weapons produce horrific, indiscriminate effects. Even when not used, they pose great risks. Accidents could happen any time. The manufacture of nuclear weapons can harm public health and the environment. And of course, terrorists could acquire nuclear weapons or nuclear material.

Most states have chosen to forgo the nuclear option, and have complied with their commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Yet some states view possession of such weapons as a status symbol. And some states view nuclear weapons as offering the ultimate deterrent of nuclear attack, which largely accounts for the estimated 26,000 that still exist.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence has proven to be contagious. This has made non-proliferation more difficult, which in turn raises new risks that nuclear weapons will be used.

The world remains concerned about nuclear activities in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and in Iran. There is widespread support for efforts to address these concerns by peaceful means through dialogue.

There are also concerns that a “nuclear renaissance” could soon take place, with nuclear energy being seen as a clean, emission-free alternative at a time of intensifying efforts to combat climate change. The main worry is that this will lead to the production and use of more nuclear materials that must be protected against proliferation and terrorist threats.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The obstacles to disarmament are formidable. But the costs and risks of its alternatives never get the attention they deserve. But consider the tremendous opportunity cost of huge military budgets. Consider the vast resources that are consumed by the endless pursuit of military superiority.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military expenditures last year exceeded \$1.3 trillion. Ten years ago, the Brookings Institution published a study that estimated the total costs of nuclear weapons in just one country—the United States—to be over \$5.8 trillion, including future cleanup costs. By any definition, this has been a huge investment of financial and technical resources that could have had many other productive uses.

Concerns over such costs and the inherent dangers of nuclear weapons have led to a global outpouring of ideas to breathe new life into the cause of nuclear disarmament. We have seen the WMD Commission led by Hans Blix, the New Agenda Coalition and Norway's seven-nation initiative. Australia and Japan have just launched the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. Civil society groups and nuclear-weapon states have also made proposals.

There is also the Hoover plan. I am pleased to note the presence here today of some of that effort's authors. Dr. Kissinger, Mr. Kampelman: allow me to thank you for your commitment and for the great wisdom you have brought to this effort.

Such initiatives deserve greater support. As the world faces crises in the economic and environmental arenas, there is growing awareness of the fragility of our planet and the need for global solutions to global challenges. This changing consciousness can also help us revitalize the international disarmament agenda.

In that spirit, I hereby offer a five-point proposal.

First, I urge all NPT parties, in particular the nuclear-weapon-states, to fulfil their obligation under the treaty to undertake negotiations on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament.

They could pursue this goal by agreement on a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing instruments. Or they could consider negotiating a nuclear-weapons convention, backed by a strong system of verification, as has long been proposed at the United Nations. Upon the request of Costa Rica and Malaysia, I have circulated to all UN member states a draft of such a convention, which offers a good point of departure.

The nuclear powers should actively engage with other states on this issue at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, the world's single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum. The world would also welcome a resumption of bilateral negotiations between the United States and Russian Federation aimed at deep and verifiable reductions of their respective arsenals.

Governments should also invest more in verification research and development. The United Kingdom's proposal to host a conference of nuclear-weapon states on verification is a concrete step in the right direction.

Second, the Security Council's permanent members should commence discussions, perhaps within its Military Staff Committee, on security issues in the nuclear disarmament process. They could unambiguously assure non-nuclear-weapon states that they will not be the subject of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The Council could also convene a summit on nuclear disarmament. Non-NPT states should freeze their own nuclear-weapon capabilities and make their own disarmament commitments.

My third initiative relates to the "rule of law." Unilateral moratoria on nuclear tests and the production of fissile materials can go only so far. We need new efforts to bring the CTBT into force, and for the Conference on Disarmament to begin negotiations on a fissile material treaty immediately, without preconditions. I support the entry into force of the Central Asian and African nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties. I encourage the nuclear-weapon states to ratify all the protocols to the nuclear-weapon-zone treaties. I strongly support efforts to establish such a zone in the Middle East. And I urge all NPT parties to conclude their safeguards agreements with the IAEA, and to voluntarily adopt the strengthened safeguards under the Additional Protocol. We should never forget that the nuclear fuel cycle is more than an issue involving energy or non-proliferation; its fate will also shape prospects for disarmament.

My fourth proposal concerns accountability and transparency. The nuclear-weapon states often circulate descriptions of what they are doing to pursue these goals, yet these accounts seldom reach the public. I invite the nuclear-weapon states to send such material to the UN Secretariat, and to encourage its wider dissemination. The nuclear powers could also expand the amount of information they publish about the size of their arsenals, stocks of fissile material and specific disarmament achievements. The lack of an authoritative estimate of the total number of nuclear weapons testifies to the need for greater transparency.

Fifth and finally, a number of complementary measures are needed. These include the elimination of other types of WMD; new efforts against WMD terrorism; limits on the production and trade in conventional arms;

and new weapons bans, including of missiles and space weapons. The General Assembly could also take up the recommendation of the Blix Commission for a “World Summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction”.

Some doubt that the problem of WMD terrorism can ever be solved. But if there is real, verified progress in disarmament, the ability to eliminate this threat will grow exponentially. It will be much easier to encourage governments to tighten relevant controls if a basic, global taboo exists on the very possession of certain types of weapons. As we progressively eliminate the world's deadliest weapons and their components, we will make it harder to execute WMD terrorist attacks. And if our efforts also manage to address the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions that aggravate terrorist threats, so much the better.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the United Nations in 1961, President Kennedy said, “Let us call a truce to terror?. Let us invoke the blessings of peace. And as we build an international capacity to keep peace, let us join in dismantling the national capacity to wage war.”

The keys to world peace have been in our collective hands all along. They are found in the UN Charter and in our own endless capacity for political will. The proposals I have offered today seek a fresh start not just on disarmament, but to strengthen our system of international peace and security.

We must all be grateful for the contributions that many of the participants at this meeting have already made in this great cause. When disarmament advances, the world advances. That is why it has such strong support at the United Nations. And that is why you can count on my full support in the vital work that lies ahead.

Thank you very much for your support.