

Secretary-General's remarks to the 61st Session of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters [as prepared for delivery]

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I am pleased to join you for the close of your 61st session.

I thank Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati for his leadership. I know you have had a very busy week.

You have two pressing matters before you.

First, verification with a special focus on new technologies and the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. And second, the disarmament and security implications of emerging technologies.

As recognized by the General Assembly, verification is critically important in the negotiation and implementation of arms limitation and disarmament agreements.

Nowhere has this been better demonstrated than in the ongoing destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Eliminating Syria's chemical weapons marked an important step forward, unifying the international community during one of the bloodiest and most divisive conflicts of recent years.

More broadly through verification, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has confirmed the elimination of 82 per cent of declared weapon stockpiles around the world.

We need new thinking on how to adapt the lessons in verifying the elimination of chemical weapons to other categories of WMD – namely nuclear and biological weapons.

As you are aware the 2010 NPT Action Plan emphasized the need for accurate verification of nuclear disarmament. This built upon the important work by Norway and the United Kingdom on the dismantlement of nuclear warheads.

Their initiative has shown how nuclear disarmament can be verified, using available technologies. It also revealed practical and political issues that are yet to be addressed.

NPT States parties want to see greater cooperation from governments, the United Nations, other international organizations and civil society. I hope the Board can help develop effective arrangements for further nuclear disarmament.

Despite significant challenges, I am pleased that States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention have been able to adopt effective measures aimed at promoting transparency and improving confidence.

Now let me turn to the second issue on your agenda.

I was pleased by your productive discussion last year on the disarmament and security implications of emerging technologies -- focusing in particular on armed unmanned aerial vehicles – UAVs – and on autonomous weapon systems.

As you know, last year for the first time the Security Council authorized the use of unarmed UAVs for peacekeeping operations. At the same time, there remain persistent and growing concerns over the proliferation and use of armed UAVs. I encourage you to continue your work on this issue.

I also share your concerns and conclusions about autonomous weapons. The increasing trend towards automation of warfare gave rise to a wide range of legal, ethical or societal concerns that had to be addressed, including possibly through disarmament action.

Most importantly, you recommended a comprehensive study on the development, proliferation and use of this technology.

I took your advice. In my message to the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in November, I called for greater vigilance. I urged them to address the implications arising from emerging weapons and their technologies.

In particular, I encouraged them to look at all aspects of the issue of autonomous weapons systems to better understand their potentially grave humanitarian impact while considering implications for international humanitarian law and the Convention through their possible use.

I welcome the decision by the High Contracting Parties to convene an informal meeting in May to discuss how weapons technology might impact the Convention.

Yet, there remain other aspects of this issue which will need to be addressed, including those you identified last year.

I count on you to continue to explore all innovative ways to keep the United Nations at the forefront of global disarmament.

Once again, I deeply appreciate your vital work. I wish you well in your remaining deliberations.

Thank you.

