



**Opening statement to the plenary session of the First Committee
of the United Nations General Assembly**

Mr. KIM Won-soo

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs



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Chairperson, His Excellency Ambassador Sabri Boukadoum
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege and an honour to address the Committee. First of all, I thank the Chairperson for the opportunity and assure you and the bureau of the full support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. I also want to pay tribute to Ambassador Karel van Oosterom, outgoing chair, for his outstanding stewardship of and contribution to the Committee.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the very first General Assembly Resolution, concerning “the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons.” One year ago the historic adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals also recognised the crucial link between development and disarmament.

These led to greater interest and attention from the international community on the disarmament agenda. Civil society participation in the disarmament processes is increasing, including in the Arms Trade Treaty, the Conference on Disarmament, the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the Open-Ended Working Group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament. The world’s youth are also increasingly involved in the disarmament discourse. The younger generations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are conscious of taking the torch from their parents and grandparents, the Hibakusha, victims of the atomic bombings, to spread their message of peace and a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Posters for Peace competition was launched by UNODA to commemorate the First General Assembly Resolution. It received four thousand entrants from one hundred and twenty three countries. It sparked global enthusiasm among the world’s youth. We have been able to use it on multiple continents as a year round tool for disarmament education and awareness.

2016 also marks twenty years since the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was negotiated. This was an opportunity to shine the spotlight on nuclear disarmament, leading to Security Council resolution 2310 – the first ever on the CTBT. This was significant. But it can in no way substitute for a CTBT in force and I once again call on the eight remaining Annex 2 States not to wait for others, but act first.

Unfortunately, 2016 also saw divisions over nuclear disarmament deepen – between non-nuclear-weapon states and nuclear-weapon States and like-minded states, but also between the nuclear-weapon States. This led to yet another disappointing failure at the Conference on Disarmament to adopt a programme of work.

There is a growing frustration over the stalemate at the plurilateral and multilateral levels, and the seeming halt to bilateral reductions.

If we are to reach our shared goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, all States need to recognize that there can be no more business as usual and step up their effort to listen more

attentively to different views. Breaking with business as usual requires all States to show greater flexibility and creativity to narrow differences and find common ground.

Over the coming weeks in the First Committee, we hope that all States will be actively engaged in finding an inclusive path forward to resuscitate nuclear disarmament.

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

We have all looked on in horror as toxic chemicals continue to be used as weapons in the Middle East. The United Nations-Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Joint Investigative Mechanism has found that these horrific weapons have been used in the Syrian Arab Republic by both state and non-state actors.

The taboo against the use of chemical weapons must be upheld again and those who used these weapons held accountable. The use of chemical weapons should not be allowed to become the ‘new normal’.

We need to strengthen efforts to prevent vicious non-state actors from acquiring chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons.

Both the Comprehensive Review of Security Council resolution 1540 and the Biological Weapons Convention are opportunities to take that action.

However, the international community also needs to ask, what if prevention fails?

The possibility of a biological incident is especially worrying. The deliberate release of a pathogen like Ebola, designed to cause maximum damage, would be a global health nightmare.

The risk is growing. So is the preparedness gap. The consequences of not acting far outweigh the costs of taking action now.

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Sustainable Development Goals, through Goal 16, target 4, seek significant reductions in illicit arms flows.

In 2016, the successful Sixth Biennial Meeting of States on the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons strengthened the relationship between the SDGs and the Programme of Action. It also took important steps to incorporate ammunition into the programme.

UNODA pledges to work with Member States to sharpen its indicators and build capacity, including through our regional centres.

I am pleased to note that this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the regional centres in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific. In the past decade alone, the regional centres have trained more than 20,000 personnel in arms control, helped destroy over 176,000 small arms and light weapons and 132 tons of ammunition, and marked over 13,000 weapons. More than 500 seminars, workshops and conferences have been organized. Through disarmament education, the centres reached over 400,000 children and adolescents.

We also welcomed the twenty-fifth anniversary of the UN Register of Conventional Arms, one of our most important transparency instruments. The Group of Government Experts on the Register, who met this year, made significant progress by recommending that armed drones be included in its categories.

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The threats I have highlighted are compounded by a global technological revolution. As we become increasingly networked, we must be mindful of emerging vulnerabilities. The number of daily cyberattacks is spiking and there have been repeated attempts to hack critical infrastructure, including nuclear power plants.

The international community needs to ensure the peaceful use of cyberspace. In a cyber age, the international community must identify the international laws, norms and principles governing responsible state behavior in cyberspace. The fifth Group of Governmental Experts recently started its deliberations. I look forward to its substantive report to the General Assembly next year.

Likewise, growing dependence on space-based assets is creating new vulnerabilities and increasing the risk that any conflict in space could have catastrophic consequences. The international community must strive for common ground to build the norms that will ensure the peaceful use of outer space for the benefit of all.

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to address, as a matter of urgency, the issue of timely payment by Member States of their financial obligations under the treaties to which they are States parties or meetings in which they participate as non-State parties. Late payment jeopardises the functioning of these treaties. New financial accountability initiatives endorsed by the General Assembly and implemented by the UN Secretariat to ensure transparency and accountability will no longer allow the Secretariat to support a meeting, unless the necessary cash has been received in advance and previous arrears are also paid in full. States parties have been repeatedly warned of this problem. Every State party receives a reminder or confirmation concerning their contributions once a year.

The first casualty of this stricter enforcement could be the 15th Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention. To avoid postponement, a minimum of \$406,500

is required by 26 October 2016. We should not let this important meeting be pushed aside simply because of outstanding debt. It would send the wrong signal to the world. That is why Director-General of UNOG, Michael Moller, and I decided to join Foreign Minister Hernando Muñoz of Chile in sending an urgent letter to indebted states. I would like to thank those States that have so far responded positively to our appeal.

This same problem is envisaged for a number of other treaties, including the BWC and Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. I appeal to those states owing money to settle as promptly as possible. The dues are not that high. In the case of the BWC some are lower than twenty dollars.

Collectively, we need to seek a longer-term solution. We need to devise a more effective means to ensure implementation support and conference servicing. It is time for a hard look at the multitude of practices and structures that began as temporary or seemingly cheaper fixes. The shake-up in accountability and transparency the General Assembly has endorsed should go hand in hand with an overhaul in how we plan, manage and conduct our business.

For the purposes of transparency, I have asked the Secretariat to circulate a summary of outstanding dues. I look forward to working with you to find practical sustainable solutions.

Distinguished delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The pursuit of peace is symbiotic with the pursuit of prosperity and justice. In the words of the Secretary-General, “peace, sustainable development and human rights – the three pillars of the United Nations – are mutually reinforcing. They are three sides of the same triangle.”

Succeeding in our ambitions requires the jettisoning of old mind-sets and the willingness to get out of business as usual. As I have laid out, this year marks a number of important anniversaries of the milestone achievements that spanned from seventy years ago to twenty years ago in the disarmament agenda. Those were made possible because of the collective commitment of all states to the cause of complete and irreversible disarmament. I hope the same spirit will guide us through the deliberations of this year’s First Committee.

I thank you so much.