



**High Representative's Statement to the sixty-second session of the
Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters**

By

Angela Kane
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs



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Excellences, distinguished members of the Advisory Board, I welcome you to Geneva at the start of your sixty-second session. This is the city of Voltaire and Rousseau—a city whose motto (“Post tenebras lux” – after darkness light) offers some inspiration for your work.

At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati for his excellent stewardship of the work of the Board. I am particularly pleased that the Secretary-General has agreed that he remain as Chair of the Board for another term.

I also thank each Board member for setting aside time from your other obligations to join in this unique forum in the UN disarmament machinery. I have no doubt that your commitment to serving will be equally matched by the fruitfulness of your deliberations this week.

Since we met last March in New York, it has been an eventful inter-sessional period, with some signs of progress and some setbacks, as seems to be the norm in this field.

In May, we welcomed the signing by the nuclear-weapon States of the Protocol to the Treaty on a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia, which extends negative security assurances to the parties to the Treaty. We all hope that the nuclear-weapon States will take the next step of ratifying the Protocol without delay, while also bringing into force all the relevant Protocols to the other regional nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties.

The Secretary-General has often voiced his strong support for the further establishment of such zones—especially in the Middle East—and was grateful for the Board's inclusion of this subject on your agenda last year. Such zones help to strengthen global norms against nuclear weapons, to the benefit of non-proliferation, regional security and disarmament.

In Syria, we find a complex case, involving on the one hand continuing progress in destroying its chemical weapons arsenal and related capabilities following the country's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention last year. Yet we have also seen new allegations of use of such weapons, which are presently the subject of fact-finding.

This last case illustrates how technology has offered the world a double-edged sword—it can be used to destroy weapons and to verify that destruction has occurred, yet it can also be used to build horrific weapons that kill with indiscriminate effects.

This current session of the Advisory Board provides a good opportunity to make progress in addressing both these challenges. The agenda before you calls for continued discussion of two pressing matters in the field of disarmament and international security.

The first issue—verification with a special focus on new technologies—is especially relevant today in addressing the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction.

The General Assembly has long recognised verification as a matter of critical importance in the negotiation and implementation of arms limitation and disarmament agreements. The Secretary-General, therefore, appreciates very much your continuing work on this issue, in particular your focus on the emerging verification technologies. He looks forward to the results of your deliberations.

You have the opportunity in this session to build on the constructive exchange you had earlier this year, including your examination of existing precedents for warhead dismantlement verification and the possibility that they could serve as a foundation for building future verification initiatives. We all know there still remain many challenges ahead when it comes to warhead dismantlement. Such challenges often call for new ideas and ways of thinking. I am convinced that all of you are more than well-prepared to meet that challenge.

Your deliberations have already made it clear that there is interesting work to be done on the common frontier shared by technology and diplomacy, two fields that are often kept distinct yet increasingly overlap in our current technological age. I would be quite interested in your thoughts on what dividends that science diplomacy can bring in meeting the technical and political challenges of verification. Diplomacy of this kind can logically be a valuable conflict resolution tool and can offer a rare opportunity for progress in verification.

Science diplomacy has provided unique opportunities for scientists around the world to collaborate on projects that address the world's most pressing challenges, including sustainable development, the preservation of the environment, and combatting disease and hunger. Surely, it can also be deployed to maximize the contribution that verification can make in preventing conflict and advancing disarmament goals.

The second issue—the disarmament and security implications of emerging technologies—is an equally important one, though here we see a somewhat darker side of science and technology in their contributions to the development of new weaponry.

I note that you agreed to a comprehensive examination of the topic, exploring the technical and political elements surrounding emerging technologies of concern, including the development of autonomous weapons systems. I fully appreciate the challenges inherent in attempting to control emerging technologies. While it may not be a priority of all Member States, it is, nevertheless, a complex and potentially controversial issue that needs to be urgently addressed precisely because its future implications have the potential to affect the entire international community.

The implications of autonomous weapons systems for international humanitarian and human rights law in the context of meaningful human control and supervision are of considerable international interest, as well as a personal interest of mine. In July last year, I contributed an article in the Huffington Post on the challenges posed by such weapons systems.

It is undeniable that warfare is becoming increasingly automated. Many governments are actively pursuing weapon systems that operate with increasing autonomy. Despite uncertainty over the pace of technical developments, there are serious concerns that must be addressed pertaining to the possible employment of weapon systems that have the capability of selecting and attacking targets without human intervention.

There is a widespread view that such weapons must be subject to meaningful human control, yet exactly how they can be used in conformity with the rules of international humanitarian law remains unresolved.

Such a challenge offers an opportunity for the Advisory Board to make a much needed contribution to an ongoing debate that could ultimately lead to the further strengthening of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

For its part, UNIDIR has done commendable work to address the international community's concerns about autonomous weapons systems through a project launched earlier this year. This important work needs to be continued, which brings me to the issue of the continuing viability and future of UNIDIR.

A substantial portion of your time here in Geneva will be taken up with your function as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR. You will deliberate over the future of UNIDIR and assist the Secretary-General in the selection of its new Director. I share your deep concern for the future of UNIDIR and look to you for your ideas on how we should proceed at this critical juncture in the life of this important institution.

I look forward to reading the results of your deliberations and wish you the best of luck in the days and months ahead.