



Statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly

By

Angela Kane

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs



United Nations Headquarters
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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. I welcome this opportunity to address the Committee and am especially pleased to greet members of delegations who are joining us for the first time.

It is my honour to congratulate your Chairperson on his appointment to guide our work. Ambassador Dabbashi's extensive diplomatic experience will serve the Committee well. I also wish to recognize the members of the Bureau and to assure them and all delegations of the fullest cooperation of the Office for Disarmament Affairs throughout the work of the Committee.

One of the curious ironies about the UN is that it is located on the banks of the East River, which flows daily—with the tides—in two directions. The past work of this Committee has followed a similar course, resembling in many ways a river with counter-currents.

On one level, its deliberations have been characterized by polarized debates on past setbacks, disappointments, unfulfilled commitments, and common frustrations.

Yet there is another current flowing in the opposite direction, representing the growth of global solidarity behind principles, standards, and norms regarding both disarmament and the regulation of armaments. This is the current that led to the adoption this year of the Arms Trade Treaty.

As it opens its 2013 session, the Committee is once again confronting these two currents. Yet we have seen many positive developments and our work now appears to be flowing in the right direction.

Consider the outpouring of international recognition this year of the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. This was a featured theme of the international conference in Oslo in March, and at two special UN initiatives focused on nuclear disarmament: the Open-Ended Working Group in Geneva and the High-Level Meeting at UN headquarters. This theme has also been stressed at the Article XIV conferences of states parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Most of the world is now looking at nuclear weapons through the same lens, and this offers an auspicious sign for future progress in disarmament.

The counter-current—representing those who still view nuclear weapons as an indispensable insurance policy and a status symbol—is hardly likely to alter the flow of this particular river.

This general and growing abhorrence of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is setting the stage for future progress in many related fields. It helps to clarify the vital need for progress in establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. I hope this current will soon flow to a great hall hosting an international conference on establishing this zone, as decided at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Shared concerns about nuclear weapons have expanded cooperation between members of regional nuclear-weapon-free zones and at common multilateral arenas like the sessions of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference.

These concerns extend to the proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction as well as the danger that they will be acquired by non-state actors. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has long been assisting NPT states parties throughout the treaty review process. And through our assistance in implementing Security Council resolution 1540, we are also helping to prevent the proliferation of such weapons to non-state actors. We view such work not as ends in themselves, but as part of wider global efforts to delegitimize and eliminate all weapons of mass destruction.

The Office has also been very active this year in implementing the Secretary-General's Mechanism, which has been activated to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Once again, international recognition of the terrible humanitarian effects of these weapons has helped to provide a common foundation for collective action to address such uses. While its tragic civil war continues, Syria's decision to abandon its chemical weapon arsenal and to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) were welcome developments; they may well have positive repercussions throughout the region, indeed the world. As of today, the same number of states—190—have joined the CWC as have joined the NPT.

In the field of conventional arms, the highlight of the year was undoubtedly the adoption of the landmark Arms Trade Treaty last April. By establishing common standards for the regulation of international trade in such arms, the Treaty will help enormously to prevent destabilizing arms flows to conflict regions. It will help ensure that arms trade policy is more responsible in order to limit and prevent the humanitarian consequences currently surrounding this unregulated industry. In so doing, it will also create an environment more suitable to achieving economic and social development objectives. Already 113 States have signed the Treaty and this number will surely continue to grow in the years ahead. In short, we are witnessing a new flow in the current toward universal norms governing the arms trade.

Another highlight this year was the Security Council's adoption last month of its first-ever resolution devoted to the question of small arms and light weapons. The resolution underscores the vital need for cooperation and exchange of information between UN peacekeeping operations, UN missions in the field, relevant sanctions committees, groups of experts, and Member States. The costs of this illicit trade have included the prolongation of armed conflicts, the setting back of social and economic development, the aggravation of threats to peacekeepers, and regional instability.

Another aspect of that small arms resolution deserves attention in this Committee—namely, its welcome recognition of the impact of armed violence on women and girls and the need to address their needs in planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities.

As has tragically been the case, the highest costs of both weapons of mass destruction and of conventional arms are borne by the people—either through the destruction resulting from the use

of such weapons or through the social and economic opportunity costs of massive military expenditures. For this reason, Member States have long recognized the importance of disarmament education, and it continues to be one of the core activities of the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

The UN's Programme of Fellowships on Disarmament has trained nearly 900 public officials, mainly from developing countries, and this year another 25 diplomats are benefitting from what UN auditors have said is one of the most successful United Nations training programmes. I wish to express my appreciation to China, Germany, Japan, Kazakhstan, and Switzerland for hosting visits by the Fellows this year.

We have also focused our efforts on building up the technical skills of government officials. For example, we conducted numerous workshops across Latin America and the Caribbean in stockpile management and small arms and ammunition destruction. These were based on the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines mandated by the General Assembly, as well as the International Small Arms Control Standards.

In addition to our training activities, we have produced 25 Fact Sheets written for the public on practically every issue we confront in disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control. These Fact Sheets are excellent information tools which clearly explain the issues, provide historical context, explain the current status, and describe the role of the Office for Disarmament Affairs in addressing them. We believe these and other such publications will be useful to civil society as they continue to make their own important contributions in the field of disarmament.

On 23 October, the World Future Council—in partnership with the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Inter-Parliamentary Union—will announce at UN headquarters the winner of its Future Policy Award, which honours disarmament policies that contribute to peace, sustainable development, and security. This is another constructive way to recognize progress in this field.

Much of this progress is taking place at the regional level, including through the work of the three UN regional centres for peace and disarmament in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Africa, and in the Asia/Pacific. These regional centres reach out to local communities to help meet their needs, especially with respect to such priorities as combating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, and in security sector reform.

With respect to various reforms in the UN disarmament machinery, I welcome the establishment of an Informal Working Group in the Conference on Disarmament to focus on achieving an agreed programme of work. Meanwhile, the recent adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty will also open up an opportunity for the Committee to reduce the number of its resolutions, especially with respect to various transparency measures in connection with the arms trade that will now be covered by the Treaty. A Group of Governmental Experts on fissile materials will soon help in identifying a path toward the negotiation of a long-awaited treaty in this field.

Of course, expert advice is not in short supply to this Committee. This year alone marked the conclusion of work of three groups of governmental experts. The cyber security group agreed (inter alia) that international law, especially the Charter, is applicable in cyberspace—this is an

important reaffirmation of the rule of law in a very sensitive field. The outer space group was also able to produce a consensus report with recommendations focusing on transparency and confidence-building measures. And the arms register group offered some consensus recommendations on ways to expand participation in the Register.

Concerning these various groups, I have noticed a trend of reducing their size and duration, while substantially limiting their resources. I view these trends as representative of a current in the Committee's work that is flowing in the wrong direction. I have seen similar currents at work elsewhere in the machinery, especially with regard to the limitation of expert-level meetings focused on the various Protocols to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. At the very least, this session of the Committee presents a good opportunity to affirm the value of experts in advancing disarmament objectives.

While these and other currents of issues will become increasingly apparent as you commence the work of this Committee, I can only urge you to recall the words of William Shakespeare:

There is a tide in the affairs of men [and all people!].
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune . . .

I have every confidence that the work of this Committee will benefit from the rising tide of expectations throughout the world for new progress both in disarmament and the regulation of armaments. Please accept my best wishes in all your deliberations.