



**Annual NATO Conference on WMD Arms Control,
Disarmament and Non-proliferation**

Keynote speech by

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Reykjavik
29 October 2018

Your Excellency Minister Thordarson,

Your Excellency Permanent Secretary of State Sigurjónsson,

Assistant Secretary General Alvargonzalez,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to speak at this annual NATO Conference. I would especially like to thank the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland for hosting tonight's dinner.

It is more than fitting that we are holding this meeting in Reykjavik, where just over thirty-two years ago, the leaders of the United States and the then-Soviet Union reached what General Secretary Gorbachev called "a breakthrough, which allowed us for the first time to look over the horizon."

That Summit was a turning point, moving us forward on a path toward a safer and more secure world.

This Alliance too has been a supporter of the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

This is not surprising, because NATO has been one of the chief beneficiaries of the security dividends provided by non-proliferation and arms control instruments.

The States in this room are some of the most forceful defenders of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. You laid the ground for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and continue to vocally advocate for a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Today, a new vision, similar to the vision of the Reykjavik Summit and the robust support of Alliance States is needed to bring us out of the current more complex and challenging international security environment.

The issues discussed at this conference indeed reflect a complex and challenging security environment. States are increasingly turning from cooperation to confrontation and placing their trust in weapons instead of diplomacy.

States that possess nuclear weapons are once again using the kind of rhetoric we thought confined to the Cold War era. They are all, without exception, modernising their arsenals. The norm against chemical weapon use continues to be threatened, with a string of incidents involving the use of chemical weapons since 2012 in Iraq, Malaysia, the Syrian Arab

Republic and the United Kingdom. While bold and patient diplomacy has moved the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea back from the brink of crisis, much more work remains to be done to ensure the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We are witnessing the mixture of a cocktail of armament combined with deteriorating relationships and an increasingly multipolar international system. Throughout history, this cocktail has mostly ended in one outcome – armed conflict.

Over the course of a two-decade long stalemate, multilateral disarmament negotiations have grown more and more contentious. Rancorous debate precludes real dialogue as States talk past, rather than to, each other.

The nuclear non-proliferation regime is being challenged by regional conflicts with nuclear undertones, as well as by technological developments that could potentially erode technical barriers to proliferation.

It was against this background, that the Secretary-General launched his disarmament agenda “Securing Our Common Future”, in May of this year.

Indeed, the global context was precisely why the Secretary-General launched his agenda.

The Agenda is not starry-eyed. It does not wish away the threats to international peace and security. Because, unfortunately, these are part of today's reality.

Rather, the Agenda recognises that these threats increase the need for a concerted disarmament effort: advances in disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control can play a crucial role in conflict prevention and resolution, risk mitigation, and reducing tensions.

This view is based on historical precedent. Many landmark arms control and disarmament treaties were adopted at the height of the Cold War: The Partial Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, the NPT and the SALT Agreements. The Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty and the Open Skies Treaty were instrumental in bringing that drawn out conflict to an end.

The Agenda is not a substitute for Member States' responsibilities. It was created for the benefit of Member States and to support their efforts. It proposes options for solutions and raises questions with the aim of reinvigorating dialogue and negotiations, to stimulate new ideas and to create new momentum.

The agenda addresses three priority areas: Disarmament to Save Humanity – the elimination of weapons of mass destruction; Disarmament that Save Lives – the stricter regulation of conventional weapons; and Disarmament for Future Generations – the emerging challenges of rapid developments in science and technology. In each area, the Secretary-General not

only outlines current disarmament challenges but also opportunities. Under each pillar, he proposes and commits to take a number of concrete actions to take the agenda forward.

I will come back to Disarmament to Save Humanity, but before I do, allow me to briefly touch on the two other priority areas.

Disarmament that Saves Lives aims to mitigate the impact of conventional weapons. To that end, the Secretary-General will redouble his support to Member States in developing appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies on the use of explosive weapons in urban areas. He will also work to ensure that the UN system is able to address the challenge of illicit small arms and ammunition, including from dedicated resources within his Peacebuilding Fund. This is an area where we think we can do a lot of work together with NATO, which has over the years built up best practices and has had lot of technical cooperation experiences with partnership countries.

Disarmament for Future Generations, focuses on ensuring that developments in science and technology are not diverted or misused in ways that undermine security. It stresses the importance of responsible innovation and its application and of the need for multi-stakeholder coalitions, including the private sector.

The agenda also affirms the Secretary-General's strong commitment to make available his good offices, upon request by States, for the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflict resulting from malicious acts committed in cyber space. Under the auspices of the United Nations, five Groups of Governmental Experts have studied how to deal with the threats posed by the use of information and communication technologies in the context of international security. The Groups agreed that international law applies in the use of cyberspace and recommended 11 voluntary, non-binding norms on responsible State behaviour as well as practical measures for confidence-building and capacity-building. The Secretary-General is committed to working with States to implement these recommendations of the Groups of Governmental Experts.

In the General Assembly, States are deliberating on how to take forward discussions on the issue of cybersecurity. We look forward to supporting any process agreed to by Member States.

Let me now come back to Disarmament to save Humanity. I want to share some highlights and some ideas for its implementation.

The UN has a long history of advocating for nuclear disarmament, dating to the General Assembly's very first resolution in 1946. And the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains the UN's highest disarmament priority. The seven decades since that first resolutions have seen a multitude of commitments and undertakings, on the basis of which much progress has been made. Indeed, the size of nuclear arsenals has been reduced by 80 percent.

However, it has become obvious that this progress has stalled.

Disarmament efforts have been hobbled by paralysis in the disarmament machinery, diminished leadership from nuclear-weapon States and a mounting frustration among many States at the slow pace of disarmament, including the implementation of agreed commitments.

The impact of these factors is that common ground in multilateral disarmament has substantially vanished. Nowhere is this more evident than in the fractious back and forth that occurs within the framework of the First Committee and the NPT.

For this reason, the Secretary-General's agenda, in this area, places much of its emphasis on the need for dialogue – sincere, substantive dialogue, not rehearsed statements – between Member States to return to a common vision leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. He is prepared to exert all efforts to facilitate such dialogue.

A second priority area is the preservation and strengthening of existing norms for the disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. These include the norm against the use of nuclear weapons and the norm against testing of nuclear weapons.

Since the end of the Cold War, the norm against the use of nuclear weapons has, perhaps, been taken for granted.

Yet, as nuclear doctrines once again place growing importance on these weapons, including contemplation of battlefield use, it is in the interest of our collective, national and human security that this norm, the norm against the use of nuclear weapons, is reaffirmed and reinforced.

The Secretary-General therefore appeals to all States that possess nuclear weapons to affirm, as Mr. Reagan and Mr. Gorbachev did three decades ago, that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

But it is not only those States that have a norm-setting role. All States should affirm that, for the survival of humanity, nuclear weapons must never be used again under any circumstances.

It is equally critical to take actions to reduce the risk of the use of nuclear weapons, either intentionally, by accident or through miscalculation. Such actions could include strengthened transparency and confidence-building measures, as well as restraint in developing new types of destabilising weapons.

Nor we cannot allow the hard-won gains of the last three decades to slip away. I echo the Secretary-General's appeal to the United States and the Russian Federation to resolve their differences over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty through dialogue, as provided

for in the treaty's articles. This treaty played an important role in reducing risk, building confidence and helping to bring the Cold War to an end. Its demise would send a deeply troubling message. The United States and the Russian Federation should also take steps to extend the new START Treaty on strategic offensive arms, which is due to expire in just three years; and to reduce their nuclear stockpiles. The norm against testing is robust – all States that possess nuclear weapon capabilities, with one exception, have been committed to voluntary testing moratoria. Only the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has breached the norm in the 21st Century and when it has, the international community has responded immediately and in unison.

Unfortunately, the DPRK's tests also show that a moratorium is not enough.

Only a legally-binding prohibition can constrain the development of advanced types of nuclear weapons and put a brake on the arms race. For this reason, the Secretary-General calls on the remaining countries needed for the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to bring their ratification processes to a conclusion without delay.

The CTBT's entry into force is long overdue.

So too is the negotiation of a fissile-material cut-off treaty, which would limit both the horizontal and vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons.

A third priority area of Disarmament to Save Humanity is to work to establish practical tools for how to achieve and maintain a world free of nuclear weapons.

In this context, nuclear disarmament verification will be crucial. In the same way that the negotiation of the CTBT was preceded by decades of technical work on the verification of a then-hypothetical ban, work can and should be done now on how to verify potential future multilateral nuclear disarmament agreements. Multiple efforts are underway to achieve this goal, including a Group of Governmental Experts at the UN, as well as academia, civil society and multi-State partnerships. They should all be supported.

Let me now say a few words about the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

The 2020 NPT Review Conference will be a significant milestone for the international community's continued commitment to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. Expectations are high, but States Parties remain divided by a number of disagreements.

Failure is not in anyone's interests. The NPT is the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It has provided tangible benefits to all its States Parties for nearly five decades. Every effort must be made to ensure its continued health and success.

The Review Conference in 2020 will coincide with the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT and this presents an important moment of reflection on the Treaty's

achievements and on what still needs to be done. Success at the Review Conference requires acknowledging and respecting all States' legitimate security interests, including the human security concerns. However, the key to any successful outcome remains demonstrated progress on existing commitments made under the Treaty.

I encourage all States parties not to miss the opportunity presented by the 50th anniversary. One potential option could include holding a ministerial segment at the beginning of the Review Conference that could culminate in the adoption of a ministerial declaration. Such a political declaration, kept separate from the substantive negotiations later in the conference, could focus on uncontentious areas of agreement, highlighting the continued importance and relevance of the Treaty.

Progress on the long-overdue implementation of the 1995 resolution on the Middle East will also be a key to any successful outcome.

Less than half a year from now, the third and final session of the Preparatory Committee will provide an important opportunity to strike the right tone. While we often hear rather pessimistic remarks, I am still convinced that a successful 2020 is possible with your political will and commitment. But we must have a desire to succeed.

“Disarmament to Save Humanity” also recognizes the horrific humanitarian cost of every use of chemical weapons, as well as the damage to international peace and security done by the continued erosion of the taboo against chemical weapons. The Agenda's focus, therefore, is on ensuring accountability for any use of chemical weapons.

It is disheartening that, one hundred years after the end of the First World War, we are still talking about the use of chemical weapons. In 1997, when the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, we assumed that at least one of the most terrible weapons of that war had been consigned to the past, once and for all.

Yet, the continued use of chemical weapons in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in the past five years – and the absence of accountability for the use of such weapons – remains a blight on the conscience of the international community. Impunity for the use of these weapons is intolerable.

It is sad but true that the Security Council has not fulfilled its responsibility to bring accountability to the perpetrators of these heinous acts. The closure of the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the failure to agree on a successor has created a vacuum of accountability.

I fully support the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in its efforts to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the dedication States parties have displayed in this regard. At the same time, the Security Council must fulfil its obligations. I take this opportunity to remind Member States of the need to recover unity in

addressing this shared challenge and of my own willingness to engage with all in pursuit of this objective.

With the CWC approaching universal membership, change is also coming to the Secretary-General's Mechanism (SGM) that was established to investigate the alleged use of chemical, biological or toxin weapons pursuant to the mandate contained in the 1987 General Assembly resolution. Given the mandate of the OPCW, efforts to improve the operational readiness of the SGM will focus primarily on biological weapons. Unlike the CWC, the Biological Weapons Convention has no verification body – no equivalent to the OPCW to serve as an independent, fully impartial investigative mechanism able to respond to an allegation of the use of biological weapons.

We will seek to establish a core standing coordinating capacity to ensure that the Secretary-General's Mechanism is able to respond as envisioned by the General Assembly, in the event of an allegation of the use of biological weapons. My office will continue development and delivery of training of qualified experts on the roster of the Mechanism and develop – in cooperation with Member States – a network of trusted laboratories. Our goal is for the Mechanism to be able to quickly and effectively respond to requests for investigation.

At the beginning of my remarks, I outlined NATO's strong historical pedigree in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Now I call upon you to continue that tradition by supporting the Secretary-General's agenda.

Some of you have already stepped forward to offer your support and it is my hope that NATO will remain united against the threat of weapons of mass destruction, just as it remained united during the darkest days of the Cold War.

In my remarks, I have highlighted most of the commitments to action that the Secretary-General made concerning WMD. The other elements of the agenda are similarly underpinned by specific and concrete actions. We hope to work together with Member States as we undertake these actions and would welcome your support on those that align with your own priorities.

As an example, I encourage Member States to work together to identify practical and near-term risk reduction measures that can increase international security and take us further down the path to nuclear disarmament. In this region, such measures would provide welcome transparency and confidence.

History has shown that a challenging international security environment need not necessarily be a brake on disarmament efforts. Contentious debates in multilateral fora need not hinder progress, so long as they are conducted in good faith by all sides, with a common commitment to making progress.

Ultimately, forward momentum in disarmament will only be achieved by States. I therefore hope that NATO will continue its leading role in the vanguard of international efforts to permanently end the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction.

I end where I started. Today, we need a new vision, similar to the vision of the Reykjavik summit. As Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller said this morning, many arms control and disarmament negotiations took many years of hard work in the past. But these worthy, necessary efforts will make the world a more secure place for our children. I know we will never give up.

Thank you.