

Remarks at the University of Geneva on the launch of the Disarmament Agenda

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When each country pursues its own security without regard for others, we create global insecurity that threatens us all.

Chers étudiants,
Monsieur le Recteur et chers membres de l'Académie,
Monsieur le Président du Conseil d'État,
Excellences,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je vous remercie infiniment de votre accueil chaleureux et des mots tellement sympathiques que je viens d'entendre. C'est pour moi un énorme plaisir d'être de retour ici, à Genève.

And indeed, it is a pleasure to be here with you today, to focus on a subject of great global anxiety: the threat posed by weapons of all kinds.

I wanted to launch my disarmament agenda here in Geneva, the city of peace, diplomacy and humanitarian action; home to a community of peacemaking institutions, where many conflicts have been prevented and resolved.

I thank the University of Geneva for generously hosting us.

In the past few weeks and months, arms control has been in the news every day, sometimes in relation to Iran and Syria, sometimes the Korean Peninsula.

Let me say a few brief words on these recent developments.

I am deeply concerned by the cancellation of the planned meeting in Singapore between the President of the United States and the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and I urge the parties to continue their dialogue to find a path to the peaceful and verifiable de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

And I welcome all actions, by the European Union and others, to work with Iran to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Agreements like these, between countries and groups of countries, are essential to global peace and security.

But the disarmament agenda I am launching today goes beyond nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

Disarmament concerns every country, and all weapons, from hand grenades to hydrogen bombs.

Deadly weapons put us all at risk and leaders have a responsibility to minimize that risk.

The paradox is that when each country pursues its own security without regard for others, we create global insecurity that threatens us all.

Disarmament -- including arms control, non-proliferation, prohibitions, restrictions, confidence-building and, where needed, elimination -- is an essential tool to secure our world and our future.

Mesdames et messieurs, chers étudiants,

Nous vivons une époque dangereuse.

Les tensions de la guerre froide font leur réapparition, et ce, dans un monde plus complexe que celui d'hier.

La plupart d'entre vous, les étudiants de Genève, n'étaient même pas encore nés au moment de la guerre froide, lorsque le monde entier retenait son souffle en observant deux superpuissances se livrer une lutte d'influence. Fort heureusement, malgré un grand nombre d'accidents – dont certains évités de justesse – et de fausses alertes, nous avons pu échapper à un affrontement nucléaire.

Nous nous dirigeons à présent vers un monde multipolaire. Les relations internationales sont plus complexes et plus imprévisibles. Les mécanismes d'échange et de dialogue, qui contribuaient autrefois à apaiser les tensions et à faire en sorte qu'un incident isolé ne dégénère pas en conflit à grande échelle, ont perdu de leur efficacité.

Dans le même temps, la nature même de la guerre a changé.

Les conflits sont aujourd'hui plus fréquents, plus longs et plus dévastateurs pour les populations civiles. Les guerres civiles sont liées aux rivalités régionales et mondiales. Il arrive que l'on trouve parmi les belligérants des extrémistes violents, des terroristes, des milices organisées et des criminels de droit commun. Et ces groupes disposent d'un vaste arsenal qui comprend aussi bien des armes de poing que des drones ou des missiles balistiques, et qu'ils cherchent sans cesse à renforcer.

Les dépenses militaires s'accroissent et la course aux armements s'accélère au niveau mondial, notamment dans les régions les plus dangereuses.

L'année dernière, les achats d'armes et les dépenses militaires se sont élevés à plus de 1700 milliards de dollars : une somme record depuis la chute du mur de Berlin, qui représente environ 80 fois le montant nécessaire à l'aide humanitaire mondiale.

Les armes chimiques ont fait leur réapparition. La communauté internationale est divisée et ne parvient pas à prendre des mesures pour les combattre efficacement.

Des explosifs puissants et dévastateurs conçus pour le champ de bataille sont aujourd'hui utilisés dans les zones habitées.

Et de nouvelles armes utilisant l'intelligence artificielle et les systèmes autonomes voient le jour, en violation des lois et des conventions existantes.

Pendant ce temps, l'action pour mettre fin à la pauvreté, promouvoir la santé et l'éducation, lutter contre les changements climatiques et protéger notre planète se voit privée des ressources nécessaires.

Telle est la toile de fond de mon programme d'action pour le désarmement.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

My agenda has three priorities: disarmament to save humanity, disarmament to save lives, and disarmament for future generations.

First: disarmament to save humanity aiming to reduce and eliminate weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical and biological.

The total elimination of nuclear weapons is in the DNA of the United Nations. Indeed, it was the subject of the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly in 1946.

And today, the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains our priority, to which I reaffirm my commitment. But efforts to achieve this goal are in state of severe crisis.

Our world is going backwards.

Throughout and immediately after the Cold War, it was possible, through difficult negotiations, to yield agreements that reduced arsenals, outlawed nuclear testing, and dismantled whole categories of missiles.

Communication channels enhanced transparency, built confidence and reduced risks.

Three ex-Soviet States – Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine – repatriated nuclear weapons in their possession. South Africa unilaterally dismantled its nuclear arsenal. And other states took important positive steps.

World leaders at the time were fluent in the language and logic of arms control; and they understood that it was integral to security.

But the agreements of that era are now threatened as never before.

Strategic dialogue between the nuclear-weapon states remains today limited.

There are no bilateral negotiations underway between Russia and the United States for further nuclear arms reductions.

Governments are pouring resources into updating old weapons systems, developing new ones, and entering into what many see as a new arms race, based on quality rather than quantity.

Some 15,000 nuclear weapons remain stockpiled around the world. Hundreds are ready to be launched within minutes. We are one mechanical, electronic or human error away from a catastrophe that could eradicate entire cities from the map.

We all agree that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is central to the maintenance of international peace and security.

This landmark treaty, which is nearly 50 years old, has successfully limited the number of states that possess nuclear weapons to less than ten. Its safeguards regime provides assurance of the exclusively peace nature of civil nuclear programmes.

But beyond that, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is also essential to preserving an environment conducive to disarmament.

Non-proliferation and disarmament are two sides of the same coin. Together, they constitute a reciprocal legal arrangement between the nuclear and non-nuclear states.

Reversal on one side will lead to reversal on the other and we have reasons to fear the risks in relation to the Non-Proliferation Treaty today.

I appeal to all states, including non-parties, to adhere to the non-proliferation and disarmament obligations and commitments under the NPT.

All States, nuclear and non-nuclear, must work together to bridge the gulf that divides them.

Some characterize the differences as a choice between humanitarian and security concerns. But that is a false dichotomy.

Human security, national security and global security are indivisible. When people fear for their lives, their communities, societies and countries are at increased risk. When people enjoy safety, so do their countries and the world.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted last year and central in the awarding of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, demonstrated strong international support for a permanent end to the threat posed by nuclear arms.

And it was also a call to break the stalemate in nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

The States that possess nuclear weapons have primary responsibility. They must prevent the use of nuclear weapons, reduce the danger of nuclear war, and lead efforts on non-proliferation and disarmament.

And this must start with meeting their existing obligations, with concrete benchmarks and timelines. And some of these are decades overdue.

I appeal to the Russian Federation and the United States to resolve their dispute over the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty; to extend the New START treaty on strategic offensive arms, which is due to expire in just three years; and to take new steps towards reducing nuclear stockpiles.

Together with other States that possess nuclear weapons, they should urgently renew efforts towards reducing the dangers posed by these weapons, by taking concrete action in a number of key areas.

And here I will quote from the text of my Disarmament Agenda published today:

“These areas include reductions in overall stockpiles of all types of nuclear weapons; ensuring the non-use of nuclear weapons; reduction of the role and significance of nuclear weapons in military concepts, doctrines and policies; reductions in the operational readiness of nuclear-weapon systems; constraints on the development of advanced new types of nuclear weapons; increased transparency in nuclear-weapon programmes; and measures to build confidence and mutual trust.” End of quote.

I will do everything I can to support these efforts.

Through their policies and actions, every government should work to ensure that the 72-year practice of non-use of nuclear weapons continues indefinitely and is universally understood to be an inviolable norm.

The same should hold true of the norm against nuclear testing. By constraining the development of new types of weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty put a brake on the arms race.

With the exception of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, all governments have upheld the moratorium on nuclear tests for the past two decades. Since 1996 when the treaty opened for signature, the international community has responded to all violations of this norm – and the Security Council adopted a resolution to support the Treaty in 2016.

I appeal for States that have not yet done so to join the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty without delay.

We need to preserve the valuable gains we have made, even as we forge new understandings and new agreements.

Dialogue and negotiations are the only way forward and must guide our efforts.

And I will work directly with Member States to facilitate dialogue among governments, including through the creation of informal platforms to explore new approaches and measures to reduce risks and to build confidence.

We will redouble our work with experts at the technical level to develop practical measures to pave the way for a world free of nuclear weapons.

These should include further partial measures for disarmament, from strengthening and consolidating nuclear-weapon-free zones, to ending the production of nuclear material for weapons, limiting strategic nuclear delivery systems, and agreeing on approaches to verify disarmament.

Let us all work together to bring new urgency to achieve the universal goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

We will also take steps to end and prevent the use of other weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical weapons.

Since 2014, the fact-finding mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has examined 83 incidents involving the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Investigators have said chemical weapons were used, or were more than likely to have been used, in 14 cases so far. Each use is a crime under international law. And their widespread use may also constitute a crime against humanity.

The Security Council has failed to meet its responsibility to ensure accountability for these attacks.

And I am working with the Members of the Security Council to build new leadership and unity, to restore shared ownership and respect for the global ban on chemical weapons.

This must include the creation of a new and impartial mechanism to identify those who use them. We cannot allow continued impunity in Syria or elsewhere. And I will also support efforts to strengthen the Chemical Weapons Convention and its institutional capacity, to ensure the full implementation of this landmark disarmament treaty. We will never accept the possession or use of chemical weapons.

We must also do more to increase our ability to uphold the ban on biological weapons.

Concerns around these weapons continue to grow as developments in science and technology make them easier to develop and use. But there is currently no organization or inspectorate body supporting the Biological Weapons Convention.

I will therefore work with Member States to establish a core standing mechanism to conduct investigations into any alleged use of these weapons, based on the authority given to me.

And I will also explore long-term solutions, including strengthening the institutional capacity of the Biological Weapons Convention.

Strengthening the norms and conventions against chemical and biological weapons is in the interests of all humanity. These weapons are banned and they should never be used.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

My second priority is disarmament that saves lives, by reducing and mitigating the impact of conventional weapons.

The widespread availability of these weapons, from improvised explosive devices to ballistic missiles, rockets, artillery and illicit hand guns, contributes to the armed violence that is causing chaos in many parts of the world.

Military industries are producing ever-more weapons. The arms trade is seeking ever-expanding markets.

Countries are building up massive stockpiles of conventional arms, especially in the most conflict-prone regions of the world.

And we must counter these destabilizing trends. We have already seen how the prohibition and restriction of some conventional weapons can save and improve lives.

Anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions have been banned for years; and the Arms Trade Treaty that regulates the sale of weapons on humanitarian grounds came into force in 2014.

But despite these achievements, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict.

Beyond the appalling numbers of civilians killed and injured, conflicts are driving record numbers of people from their homes, often depriving them of food, healthcare, education and any means of making a living. At the end of 2016, more than 65 million people were

uprooted by war, violence and persecution.

As armed conflict has moved from open fields into cities, explosive weapons are particularly deadly for civilians.

And when explosive weapons are used in urban areas, some 90 percent of the casualties are civilians. These weapons also have a devastating effect on hospitals, schools, and water and electricity supplies.

That is why I will support Member States in developing appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies on the use of these weapons in residential areas.

And I will also support the collection of data on civilian casualties. We need more evidence to effect changes to policies, military operational procedures and behavior, and create stronger global standards to protect civilians.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

The United Nations has sought to tackle the widespread availability of illicit small arms and ammunition from many angles: peace and security, gender equality, sustainable development, transnational crime, counter-terrorism and humanitarian action. United Nations peacekeepers often work on disarmament programmes around the world; they are an integral part of our work on sustaining peace.

But our work has been spread across twenty different agencies. It is fragmented and limited.

I am therefore launching a new initiative to combat the illicit circulation and trade in small arms at the national level and across borders. I will dedicate resources within the Peacebuilding Fund to support government action on illicit small arms and light weapons, including collection and destruction, and the development of legal and policy frameworks.

United Nations peacekeepers work on disarmament programmes around the world.

My initiative will have a strong basis also in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world's blueprint for peace and prosperity on a healthy planet.

Excessive spending on weapons drains resources for sustainable development. It is incompatible with creating stable, inclusive societies, strong institutions, effective governance and democracy, and a culture of respect for human rights.

And there is also a strong gender dimension to this work. Almost universally, guns are infused with masculine characteristics. Men make up the overwhelming majority of the owners and users of firearms. Women are several times more likely to be victims of gun violence than perpetrators.

The presence of excessive and unregulated firearms exacerbates gender-based violence and shores up traditional gender roles and power relations. We must prevent a culture of violence and bloodshed, and a cycle that is difficult to break.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

My third priority is disarmament for future generations.

Advances in science and technology are transforming many aspects of our lives for the better.

Technological progress has increased trade and prosperity, and improved living conditions in many parts of the world.

Technologies including big data and analytics, artificial intelligence and automation, should help us to combat and mitigate the impact of climate change, to protect our environment, and to create conditions for growth and development that benefit everyone.

But many of these developments are also enabling new weapon technologies with dangerous and repugnant applications.

They could open a new battle field, or start a new arms race.

Some developments could challenge existing legal, humanitarian and ethical norms. The prospect of autonomous weapons has already generated considerable public anxiety. Human beings must remain in control of the use of force at all times.

Some, like armed drones, could challenge long-standing interpretations of international law. We need common standards to promote accountability, transparency and oversight.

Some, like advances in gene editing and synthetic biology, could enable new types of biological warfare, making these prohibited weapons easier to use. There is another reason to increase the capacity of the Biological Weapons Convention and its instruments.

The continued development of hypersonic, ballistic missiles and space-based weapons could create new threats to security and add new complications to nuclear disarmament.

Meanwhile, the malicious use of cyber space is growing and its impacts are becoming more widespread.

If there is a major outbreak of armed conflict in our world – and we all hope there is not – I am sure that it would be preceded by a massive cyber-attack.

And there is consensus that international law, including the United Nations Charter, applies to cyberspace.

However, there is a lack of consensus about precisely how international law applies, and how States may respond to malicious or hostile acts, within the law.

Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure could have serious consequences for international relations, peace and security. We could even face the creation of cyberweapons of mass destruction.

The combined risks of new weapon technologies could have a game-changing impact on our future security.

Our joint disarmament efforts in this area must have a game-changing preventive impact.

There are many things we can do together.

Governments can improve oversight, transparency and accountability.

All States have a responsibility to determine whether new weapons they seek would be prohibited under international law.

And I am prepared to make available my good offices to prevent conflict resulting from acts committed in cyber space.

And I will support Member States to elaborate new measures, including legally binding arrangements, to make sure human beings control the use of force at all times.

I will bring together scientists and engineers who commit to developing science and technology for peaceful purposes. We urgently need their insights.

And I will explore opportunities for encouraging responsible innovation by the private sector.

I urge Governments to continue to explore multilateral measures for prevention and control.

Dear students, ladies and gentlemen,

We cannot create a safer world for all through uncoordinated action. Disarmament works best when we work together: governments, experts, civil society and individuals.

As our expectations for disarmament evolve, so must these partnerships. Let us look at our principal multilateral forums, the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission. Both will soon be 40 years old, and both have produced very little for the last half of their lifetimes.

It is past time to reinvigorate them.

They will require improved coordination, an end to duplication, better use of expertise, and above all, political courage to shift positions. I intend to work with Member States and investigate possible ways to achieve this.

One way forward is to open them up to new voices and make them as inclusive and diverse as possible.

Women have a leading role to play in all our work for global peace and security. Several women have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their role in achieving landmark disarmament treaties and in mobilizing global public opinion. Women must participate as

decision-makers in all disarmament processes, and I am totally committed to doing all I can to support this.

And young people like the students present in this room are the most important force for change in our world.

I hope you will use your voices to make a difference: from giving your time and energy to causes that matter to you, to advocating and standing up for what you know is right.

You have opportunities to act locally, to volunteer and to work through civil society organizations.

And social media offers unprecedented tools to connect, to reach across borders and join with others around the world, through campaigns, non-governmental organizations and online communities.

The United Nations would like to work with you, to help you acquire the knowledge and skills to amplify your voices and lead the change we need.

I hope you will use your power and your connections to advocate for a peaceful world, free from nuclear weapons, in which weapons are controlled and regulated, and resources are directed towards opportunity and prosperity for all.

The United Nations was created with the goal of eliminating war as an instrument of foreign policy.

But seven decades on, our world is as dangerous as it has ever been.

Disarmament prevents and ends violence.

Disarmament supports sustainable development.

And disarmament is true to our values and principles.

This is why I am presenting this Agenda for Disarmament here today.

I urge all to step up.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to our discussion.