



**Statement to the sixty-third session of the Secretary-General's
Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters**

By

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Distinguished members of the Advisory Board, it is my pleasure to be here once again in the spiritual home of disarmament at the start of your sixty-third session.

I want to express my gratitude to all of you for taking the time from your many commitments to focus on these critical matters. Regardless of your national flag, it is because of your experience and expertise in disarmament matters that you are seated at this table.

I want to thank Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati for his excellent stewardship. Under his dedicated leadership this Board has been as active as it has ever been and I am pleased that he remains as Chair of the Board for another year.

Since last you met, Vladimir Yermakov has left the Board and I wish to thank him for his service and valuable contributions. I warmly welcome our new member, Mr Vladimir Orlov.

I also want to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Jarmo Sareva and congratulate him on his recent appointment as Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). He takes the helm of UNIDIR at a very challenging time for the Institute. However, Mr Sareva is uniquely experienced for the task and I have no doubt that UNIDIR will prosper in his capable hands.

The inter-sessional period has been an eventful one. We have witnessed heightened tension between two Nuclear Weapon States that has seemingly dampened their appetite for further arms reductions and evoked the ghosts of the Cold War era, as well as the continuation of bloody regional conflicts, including in the Middle East, and the on-going threat of terrorist violence, demonstrated most recently by the tragic events in Paris. Despite these developments, the second half of 2014 saw some notable victories and optimistic trajectories for disarmament.

Perhaps the most prominent of these was the 24 December entry-into-force of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The culmination of a nearly twenty-year journey, the ATT represents, in the Secretary General's words, "a new chapter in our collective efforts to bring responsibility, accountability and transparency to the global arms trade." Its entry-into-force only two years after it was negotiated is a tribute to the important issues it addresses and the Herculean efforts of the supporting governments and civil society organisations.

The second development I would like to highlight is the gathering momentum for the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament. Support for this initiative continues to grow. At the most recent session of the General Assembly's First Committee, New Zealand delivered a statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons that was endorsed by 155 States. The third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, hosted by Austria in December, was attended by 158 States and prompted a pledge by the Austrian Government to take this issue forward.

Finally, I am pleased to note that the destruction of the 12 chemical weapons production facilities remaining in the Syrian Arab Republic has commenced. This is a most welcome development as it brings us closer to the ultimate goal of ridding Syria of its chemical weapons and their means of production.

2015 promises to be another memorable year. In August we will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by nuclear weapons – a sober reminder of the horrific humanitarian consequences of nuclear war.

May brings about the 2015 NPT Review Conference. It is my sincere hope that Nuclear Weapon States will be able to report concrete progress on the commitments they made at the 2010 Review Conference. Progress, or lack thereof, on the long-overdue Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and All Other Weapons of Mass Destruction will also likely figure as a major point of debate between States Parties.

Distinguished members, over the last two years this Board has examined topics that are not only critical today but will have ramifications for decades to come. Judging by the topics you have chosen, 2015 will be no different.

The first of these, the role of arms control in managing conflicts, is a topic of enduring relevance. During the Cold War, arms control agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union provided a strategic stabilisation mechanism that, as Strobe Talbott noted, “Served as a kind of deep-water anchor in Soviet–American relations” during a time of intense distrust when the world teetered on the brink of nuclear war.

More recently, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) has played a key role in removing one factor of the destructive conflict in Syria. Negotiated by Russia and the United States, and facilitated by the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Syria’s accession to the CWC and the subsequent process to remove and destroy its chemical weapon stockpile and infrastructure, has helped mitigate one of the most dangerous elements of this conflict.

Let me return to the issue of conventional arms. There is an obvious linkage between arms regulation and managing conflicts. The ATT, which requires each arms exporter to assess the potential of a future export of arms contributing to – or undermining – peace and security, provides one prominent example of how, through proper implementation, governments can utilise multilateral agreements to influence and limit conflicts.

The second issue, new challenges to disarmament and the increasing role of non-state actors, is, discouragingly, particularly pertinent in today’s security environment. Non-state actors, in the form of separatist, insurgent or terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and ISIL have seized large territories, committed gross human rights violations and triggered humanitarian crises. The Secretary-General has consistently called for stronger international measures to prevent terrorist groups and non-state actors from gaining access to the most lethal weapons and materials. The landmark Security Council resolution on preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to non-State actors, UN Security Council Resolution 1540, reflects international resolve to prevent nuclear, chemical or biological weapons from falling into the hands of non-state actors.

The majority of today’s armed conflicts are internecine, comprised of multiple groups and crossing porous borders. They require solutions that go beyond the traditional state-centric disarmament paradigm.

I have already touched upon your third topic for 2015 – the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. It is, as I mentioned, an issue that is gathering momentum

and I expect it to play a prominent role in May's NPT Review Conference. It is an issue that brings together a plethora of players not traditionally involved in the disarmament arena, from human rights lawyers to environmental protection groups. Its focus extends to reducing the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, engaging non-Nuclear Weapon States in the disarmament process and building a normative case against the possession and use of nuclear weapons.

It is my view that the humanitarian perspective is essential in confronting those who see nuclear weapons as a rational and appropriate response to growing international tensions or those who view them as a symbol of national pride and prestige.

Your function as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR consumed a substantial proportion of the Board's deliberations over the past year, including the future of the Institute and the selection process for a new Director. I understand the future of UNIDIR will continue to occupy your time in 2015 and note that you will consider an assessment of UNIDIR undertaken, at your request, by Mr. Desmond Bowen, a former Chair of the Advisory Board. I look forward to your views on this assessment as well as any other suggestions the Board may have on how to ensure UNIDIR can fulfil its mandate and continue to provide high quality, impartial research to the United Nations and the international community.

I wish you the best of luck for 2015 and encourage you to strive for bold and innovative solutions to the important disarmament questions you have elected to tackle.