



Statement to the First Committee of the General Assembly

Remarks on Increasing Capacities to Address Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Thank you Mr. Chairman

First of all, I would like to thank our distinguished panelists, Dr. Lassina Zerbo, Mr. Michael Moller, Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, and Ms. Tracy Brown for joining us today. I am particularly grateful to Lassina, Michael, and Ambassador Rao, for taking the time to come all the way in person to New York despite their busy schedule.

I want to address three points today. The first point is with regard to the expanding role of the United Nations in addressing the challenges of weapons of mass destruction and the importance of working with our partner organizations. The second is the need to engage the wider public and expand the discussion of WMD issues, and the third is the crucial importance of sustained political and financial support from Member States.

We are facing the reality in which, like all other international organization, the United Nations is being asked to do more today than ever before, and this is particularly true in the area with respect to our work on weapons of mass destruction.

The most recent and high profile example of how this mandate has evolved is in addressing the challenges involving chemical weapons or the use of other toxic chemicals as weapons in Syria.

As distinguished members of the First Committee all know, the Secretary-General just launched the third mission in three years. This follows the first mission launched under the Secretary-General's Mechanism in 2013 to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by the OPCW-UN Joint Mission, headed by Madame Sigrid Kaag, which was mandated to destroy Syria's declared chemical materials and facilities, and now, last month, the Secretary-General appointed Ms Virginia Gamba and two other distinguished gentlemen to lead the Joint Investigative Mechanism, mandated to identify, to the greatest extent feasible, those responsible for the alleged use of toxic chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The intensity of this work shows how strong the commitment of the international community and, in particular, the Security Council, is on this issue, and it also illustrates how much we can do when we have unity of purpose in the Security Council, in solving security challenges and other conflict-related issues.

That is why the Secretary-General places a high importance on making very sure this mechanism will do its work in the most professional, objective, and impartial manner. And that is why we are working hard with our partner organizations, starting with the OPCW, but also Interpol and the WHO, because this mechanism needs capacities on top of chemical expertise and needs complementary technical expertise from law enforcement, medical, and even military ordinance analysis.

The success of this mission will also bode very well for the implementation of our mandates in various areas related to weapons of mass destruction, but also for the accession of Syria to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as it takes us one step closer to the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention. And the Director General of OPCW and the Secretary-General, as the depository of the Treaty, will continue to make their best efforts until we have achieved universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Likewise, we at ODA are also teaming up with the CTBTO, under Dr. Lessina Zerbo's leadership, to move forward on both the entry into force of the CTBT and the universality of the treaty. I want to emphasize the importance of our teamwork in reaching that latter goal and that we will not spare any effort in that regard.

Another example of our cooperative work with our partner organizations relates to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1540 to prevent any WMD material from ending up in the hands of terrorists or other extremists. This requires, again, very close coordination with the IAEA, Interpol, and other organizations, to share lessons learned, best practice, and other resources.

We are also closely coordinating through the Nuclear Security Summit process. The process will be concluded next year, however, the coordinated plan of action between the United Nations, the IAEA and also Interpol will continue to guide our work into the future.

It would be remiss of me if I didn't touch on the importance of Geneva as a hub for international disarmament efforts and coordination. It is the home of the Convention on Biological and Toxin Weapons, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and very soon the Arms Trade Treaty.

The second issue I would like to touch on today is the need to improve outreach and public education on weapons of mass destruction. Today, my office will launch the UN poster for peace contest, applications for which will be closed by 24 January next year. We chose that date because it will mark the 70th anniversary of the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Announcement of winners will be made on the 5th of March, which will mark the 46th anniversary of the adoption of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

There are three parts that need to be done when we look at the need to complete our work on nuclear disarmament. The first part, of course, is the need for true leadership from nuclear weapon States, the second part is the need for cooperation from all states, and the third part is world public opinion and investment. Our poster campaign will try to expand that third part. We will use it to link to the CTBTO campaign on the 20th anniversary of the negotiation of the CTBT early next year. I would also like to highlight another example of coordination on public outreach: the UN Woman Scholarship for Peace coordinated by our office in Vienna, together with the CTBTO and the University of Peace in Costa Rica.

The last point I would like to make is the importance of continued financial and political support from Member States and other sources. The crucial importance of sustained political and financial support cannot be emphasized enough. The speed and generosity States have shown for the implementation of the Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria is a very good example that we would like to see emulated in other areas of our work. We hope this strong and swift backing will be repeated across the disarmament agenda, for both existing and emerging issues.

Let me close by emphasizing the unflagging commitment of the United Nations to a world free of weapons of mass destruction. I can assure you of our tireless efforts in this

regard and welcome opportunities to work with friends and partners to build our capacity and, ultimately, achieve our shared goals.

I thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.