Remarks to Disarmament Fellows

By

Angela Kane
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United Nations Headquarters
7 October 2013
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Each year, I have the honour to welcome a new group of Disarmament Fellows to the United Nations. I am pleased to recognize all 25 of you this year, and to thank you for your personal interest in disarmament issues.

I am always pleased to attend this event because I sincerely believe that this is among the most successful programmes launched at the United Nations in this field.

It has reached nearly 900 officials in governments around the world, especially in developing countries. Many of them have come back to the UN as representatives of their countries, while many more apply the skills they have learned in their day-to-day work in their respective ministries or in other multilateral disarmament arenas.

Your programme this year has been quite intensive. In just six weeks, you have visited the major disarmament forums in Geneva, Vienna and the Hague. You had the good fortune to be the first group of Disarmament Fellows to visit Kazakhstan and its former Soviet nuclear weapons test site at Semipalatinsk.

You have also observed the work of the various institutions comprising the UN disarmament machinery, including this week the First Committee of the General Assembly. And you have had opportunities to visit key disarmament-related international organizations and to interact with their expert staff.

I believe these experiences will prove useful to all of your careers, both in deepening your background on substantive issues, but also in expanding your list of professional contacts—and in this respect I would include not only the other experts you have met but also contacts between yourselves.

I see that in addition to all this other work you have also carried out focused study visits to five countries and surveyed their national policies and perspectives.

Now that you are approaching the end of this year’s programme, I am sure you have a deeper understanding of disarmament—in particular, its human dimension. Your briefings and discussions have helped to bring disarmament down to earth—you have been exposed not just to the abstract goals of disarmament, but the many practical political and organizational challenges that must be met in fulfilling them.

This is why the Programme is designed to expose you to a broad range of people in this business, including senior diplomats, government and intergovernmental organizations officials,
experts and civil society.

I know that many of you will work in other fields over the course of your long careers that lie ahead. Nevertheless, your knowledge about disarmament will still be valuable, because of the many ways that it operates to strengthen international peace and security. Progress in disarmament offers great possibilities for progress in social and human development. Just think of what could be accomplished in this world if only a fraction of the world’s annual military expenditures of $1.7 trillion are allocated for meeting basic human needs. So even if your future work focuses on development issues, you can still understand the relevance of disarmament in all your work and in building a better future for all.

I understand that you probably have many issues on your mind after this programme comes to a close, so I am of course willing to answer any questions you might have. Please accept my congratulations for the time and effort you have all invested in this year’s Disarmament Fellows Programme, and my very best wishes for success in your future careers.