Remarks on a Culture of Cooperation

By

Angela Kane
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Second Seoul Defense Dialogue
Session 1:
Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia
And Comprehensive Security in the Asia-Pacific

Seoul, Republic of Korea
12 November 2013
Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen.

I wish to thank the Ministry of National Defense for organising this conference—the Second Seoul Defense Dialogue—and for inviting me to participate in this panel discussion. I would also like to recognize Dean Desker, the moderator, Dr. Han, the presenter, Dr. Tow, the discussant, and my fellow panellists.

The Government and the people of the Republic of Korea have a long history of support for multilateral approaches to achieving disarmament and non-proliferation. This tradition continues with today’s discussion on President Park Geun-hye’s Administration’s “Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia” and its integration with existing efforts to enhance comprehensive security in the Asia-Pacific region. I am pleased to address this Initiative today.

Sixty-eight years ago, the world’s most devastating war finally came to an end—a war that killed some 70 million people, and over half of them were civilians. The architects of the UN Charter were determined—as its Preamble declared—to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. They sought to achieve this goal by establishing a new framework for the conduct of international relations, one based on cooperation, dialogue, disarmament, conventional arms control, social and economic development, and the rule of law.

As this system started to evolve, a parallel effort was underway in Europe to address the problem of war. That region focused on establishing a solid foundation of mutual trust and confidence based on cooperation in a number of less sensitive issue areas—social, economic, and cultural. This historic European experiment recognized the value of cultivating habits of cooperation that would later spill over into more sensitive areas of foreign and defence policy.

That approach inspired decades of progress in European integration. Having learned the hard lessons of two horrific world wars—and the benefits of cooperation—Europe has emerged as a region where large-scale armed conflict has become virtually unthinkable, if not impossible.

I am mentioning this history because the “Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in Northeast Asia” bears a resemblance to many aspects of the experience of European integration. It elevates cooperation and dialogue to a high priority in the relations between States. It builds on the principle of shared mutual interests. It serves to construct a system of relationships in which there are not “winners” and “losers”—but a system in which all participants are winners.

The careful cultivation of webs of interdependence stands a far better chance for solving the problem of war than does any other approach—certainly better than endlessly rising military expenditures, arms races, the perpetual development of lethal weaponry, nuclear deterrence, and mutual confrontations and provocations. As people see with their own eyes how peace pays, and war only destroys, the bonds of this secure peace will only grow stronger.

Prospects are good for this Initiative because a growing network of relationships linking people throughout this region already exists. People can exchange ideas more easily and cheaply than ever given the rapid evolution of modern communications technologies. The links of
international trade and finance are growing. With some familiar exceptions, travel is becoming much easier. Cultural exchanges are helping to promote mutual understanding.

Here in Northeast Asia we already see some early signs of an emerging “culture of cooperation” focused on the benefits of uniting both to achieve mutual benefits and to avoid mutual threats. We see the former in expanding business and commerce in this region, as well as growing person-to-person interactions across borders. And we see the latter in efforts to collaborate in curbing the dangers of nuclear weapons proliferation and terrorism, in pursuing the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, in limiting conventional armaments, and in strengthening cyber security—a major theme of this present conference.

This emerging culture of cooperation can be learned in the schools. It can be cultivated in the daily lives of families. It can be promoted by enlightened leadership at all levels of government. And it can also be advanced by military policies and practices that are able to achieve security goals without creating new threats to others.

While regional cooperation has been growing on many levels, disarmament has so far remained elusive. Yet progress is possible, because the benefits of disarmament are registered not only in strengthened international peace and security, but also in its potential to help in redirecting vast human and financial resources towards economic and social development.

The Park Administration’s Initiative could also complement the approach adopted by the ASEAN Regional Forum, which has sought to develop constructive relationships between Member States using confidence-building measures as a first step towards developing preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution mechanisms. The deepening of bilateral and multilateral relationships, including the proposed Korea-ASEAN security dialogue, cannot help but develop greater understanding between States in the Asia-Pacific region. Understanding that has a real potential to avoid future conflicts and to facilitate the achievement of disarmament goals.

The United Nations is contributing to these goals in the region through UNODA’s Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, which convenes multilateral discussion fora on a range of security and disarmament issues. Indeed, I am flying to Jeju Island just after this conference for the 12th annual UN-RoK conference on non-proliferation and disarmament issues organized by the Regional Centre and the Government of the Republic of Korea. These fora contribute to bilateral and multilateral dialogue and help foster the atmosphere conducive to meaningful progress in disarmament.

Finally, I would like to pledge the support of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, and its Regional Centre, to Member States and regional organizations as they implement their initiatives to build trust and achieve their disarmament goals.

I thank you for your attention, and look forward to discussing these issues further in this session.