High Representative’s remarks
at the Side Event of the 69th Session of the First Committee
on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education

By

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I am pleased to open this side event of the 69th session of the First Committee on Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Permanent Missions of Austria, Japan and Mexico to the United Nations for co-organizing this event and the CTBTO PrepCom and the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies for supporting this event.

Today, we are here to discuss the progress made in disarmament and non-proliferation education. We will also consider some of the current and emerging challenges in this field and offer some recommendations for going forward.

Twelve years have passed since the adoption of the United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education in 2002, which contains 34 practical and still valid recommendations. The study focused on ways to promote education and training in disarmament and non-proliferation at all levels of formal and informal education. This year, the Secretary-General submitted his biennial report1 to the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session reviewing the results of the implementation of those recommendations and possible opportunities for further advancing this field. I would like to thank all those Governments, including the three organizers of this event and those of you who provided inputs to the biennial report of the Secretary-General on this very important topic.

As elaborated in this year’s Secretary-General’s report on disarmament and non-proliferation education, Governments, international organizations and civil society groups have continued to increase the digital content of their campaigns and their use of and access to new technologies, such as social media tools, to disseminate information and reach a wider audience. These new technologies provide a platform for the Member States, the United Nations, international and regional organizations as well as civil society organizations to reach out to young people and promote their understanding of disarmament and non-proliferation issues.

While there are no universally accepted definitions of young people, the United Nations understands it as those between the ages of 10-24 years. According to the United Nations figures, there are 1.8 billion young people around the world, the largest generation of youth in history2. We, as the promoters of disarmament and non-proliferation, know very well that young people around the world have a critical role to play in raising awareness and developing new strategies to reduce the threats from weapons of mass destruction, small arms and light weapons. It is important to reach out, inform and empower these 1.8 billion young people around the world to become agents of peace by helping them mobilize, act and promote disarmament ideals throughout their schools, their communities and beyond.

Recently, in conjunction with the UN’s Department of Public Information (DPI), my Office published a new book "Action for Disarmament: 10 Things You Can Do!". It shows

1A/69/113 of 30 June 2014.
2https://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/factsheets/One%20pager%20on%20youth%20demographics%20GF.pdf
youth ten actionable steps they can take personally to lead the call for disarmament. The book presents a variety of resources for the reader to learn about history and modern uses of weapons: guns, bombs, nuclear and chemical weapons. The reader is encouraged to use that knowledge to foster dialogue with peers, the media and politicians. The action-driven format of the book makes it both an excellent primer on disarmament and also on civic engagement. To date, the publication is being translated into Bahasa Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and Spanish on a voluntary basis by academic institutions and a private foundation.

UNODA’s official website is a primary resource for information on disarmament issues and all our publications and factsheets on a wide range of issues are available on-line. We also maintain a “Disarmament Education: resources for learning” website in all 6 of the official UN languages. Through this website, students can access publications, films and recorded podcast interviews in which experts talk about topical disarmament issues. There is also a link to the UN Cyberschoolbus disarmament portal, which provides a wealth of classroom resources for teachers and students from late middle school to early college. Lesson plans at this portal cover nuclear weapons, small arms and light weapons, and landmines.

We are constantly exploring new ways to reach out to young people on disarmament issues. In 2011, we launched a “Poetry for Peace” contest in collaboration with the Government of Japan and UN Department of Public Information (DPI), and a year later we held an “Art for Peace” contest in collaboration with the Harmony for Peace Foundation and DPI. These contests were disarmament education programmes launched via the internet—they inspired children, teens and young adults worldwide to make them better acquainted with nuclear disarmament issues. Social media tools including Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest were widely used to disseminate information and reach an ever broader audience.

However, keeping in mind that nearly 90 per cent of people under 25 years of age are in developing countries who may not be connected to the digital world, we must also continue to undertake disarmament and non-proliferation education activities through print publications, conferences and workshops, media events and public speaking engagements.

In January 2012, we published a booklet entitled “Disarmament — A Basic Guide” in collaboration with the NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security. It explains basic disarmament issues in terms that not only adults but also high school students can understand. It is available in 6 official UN languages. UNODA has been seeking partners to translate the guide into as many languages as possible for educational purposes.

In 2013, our Centre in Kathmandu Nepal launched the Peace and Disarmament Education project in post-conflict Nepal. This pilot project reinforces efforts to cement peace at the national level. The project aims to help children understand and adopt non-violent ways of dealing with conflict and ultimately change their behaviour. The Centre has been working with school curriculum officials from the Ministry of Education to develop a model
curriculum for students and to introduce peace and disarmament content in textbooks for use in local schools. Down the line, UNRCPD may offer its successful model to other countries in the region and reach many more children - it could also be adapted for other parts of the globe.

At any of the locations where UNODA has offices—namely, New York, Geneva, Vienna, Lomé, Lima and Kathmandu—our staff regularly brief groups of students on disarmament matters. Briefings are usually to college or graduate school students, but also include presentations to younger grades. Our New York and Geneva Offices also train over 30 graduate students every year through the UN internship programme.

In addition, since May 2011 we have been collaborating with Hibakusha Stories, a New York-based non-governmental organization that brings atomic bomb survivors to New York City high schools to tell their stories. This NGO has also organized bi-annual briefings by hibakusha for UN tour guides, staff and permanent mission interns.

Their work has extended to training the trainers. Since 2012, Hibakusha Stories in collaboration with Peace Boat and UNODA has organized a workshop at United Nations Headquarters on nuclear disarmament for teachers at New York City Public Schools as part of their continuing education activities. The next workshop for teachers will be held here on 4 November 2014.

Hardly any of these activities have been undertaken by a single organization. In order for any kind of disarmament education activity to make an impact, it needs to be done collaboratively, with Member States, the United Nations, international and regional organizations as well as civil society organizations. And all the more, under the current economic situation, we have a compelling reason to join our forces in promoting disarmament education to young people.

This is where I will conclude my remarks today, having offered an overview with specific examples of what we are doing to advance disarmament and non-proliferation education activities especially for young people. I hope the panel discussion which will follow will explore ideas on what more we could do, including thoughts on what we could be doing better and on ways to collaborate.

Thank you.