United Nations Security Council Open Debate on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Your Excellency Dr. Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, President of the Security Council and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Malaysia,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

At the outset I would thank you for the opportunity to address the Council today and congratulate Malaysia for hosting this timely debate.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has just provided us with a strategic overview of the global challenges posed by weapons of mass destruction. I would like to add a few words about the challenges posed by chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear – or “CBRN” – materials security and Security Council Resolution 1540 of 2004.

The international community has made sound progress in trying to prevent, investigate and respond to CBRN threats and risks.

Resolution 1540 has enabled the international community to make advances in addressing proliferation of WMD to non-state actors. This includes through better reporting, adding or reinforcing legislation, assistance benefits, regional cooperation, and national action plans.

Similarly, the Secretary-General’s Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons demonstrated its utility in responding to allegations of chemical weapon use. I hope the UN-Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Joint Investigative Mechanism, when it submits the report tomorrow to this Council, will fulfil its mandate to identify the perpetrators of these horrific acts.

The Nuclear Security Summit process contributed to raising awareness of and preparedness against the dangers posed by nuclear and radiological terrorism.

But much more still needs to be done. This is a long journey.

In this journey, today’s debate and the on-going Comprehensive Review of Resolution 1540 are important landmarks.

If we ask ourselves, is the international community prepared to address the full scope of CBRN threats and risks, unfortunately, the answer is “not yet”. We have significant gaps in a number of areas. The Joint Investigative Mechanism is one example to fill the gap in identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks.

I want to highlight two points the international community must examine in the international architecture.

First, biological threats and risks. With increasing reports of terrorist groups seeking to acquire biological materials, we need to ensure the investment in preventing biological incidents is commensurate to the threat and risk. Both the 1540 Comprehensive Review and the Biological Weapons Convention Review Conference in November are opportunities to
consider how these instruments can be strengthened and enhanced to provide crucial prevention and preparedness.

The second issue is how the international community should respond if prevention fails. Despite our concerted prevention efforts, a CBRN attack may happen with repercussions that are likely to be beyond the remits of a concerned international agency or the capacity of the attacked country. As Professor Koblentz clearly indicated, the repercussions of such an attack will be multiplied by exploitation of new technological advances, such as genetic engineering and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, just to name a few. Then it would almost certainly become a complex international health and humanitarian emergency, disrupting law and order. Its response will require the coordination and deployment of a wide array of agencies, at the national, regional and multilateral levels.

In such an event, the international community will likely turn to the United Nations, as was the case with the recent Ebola response.

We have made some progress in developing investigative mechanisms, but any international response will need to go beyond an investigation. The international community needs to think hard about what to do in advance of such an eventuality.

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Security Council

In closing, I want to reiterate the Secretary-General’s key point: the need for accelerated action on disarmament and non-proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction.

The ultimate way to reduce the risk of a non-state actor using a WMD is through their complete and irreversible elimination.

Achieving a world free of weapons of mass destruction is the collective responsibility of all states. Overcoming divisions in approaches requires inclusive dialogue, commitment, flexibility and creativity by all states.

Today’s debate is a demonstration of Security Council members’ commitment to pursuing the crucial challenge of preventing WMD proliferation. We hope that Security Council members will continue to show leadership until we have achieved our shared goal of a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs is at your disposal to provide whatever assistance is required.

Thank you.