First Plenary Presentation

The Small Arms Issue: Achieving Sustainable Disarmament

Statement

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Introduction

It is a privilege for me to address this important international conference on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose words and deeds have underscored the priority he attaches to addressing the twin challenges of sustainable development and sustainable disarmament.

I am also honored to speak before such a distinguished audience, and in particular for being on the same panel as President Konare of Mali and Foreign Minister Axworthy of Canada, who have both contributed so significantly in shaping the international agenda on small arms. We all agree that strong international cooperation and coordination will be crucial to the success...
Context

Before highlighting some specific achievements in this field, I would like to review certain features of the broader context underlying our deliberations today. The theme of this international conference is an intriguing one, for the relationship between disarmament and development -- like the old choice between "guns" and "butter" -- has preoccupied nation states from time immemorial.

The world community created both the League of Nations and the United Nations largely to help their members grapple with these fundamental problems on an international dimension. At the founding of these institutions, representatives of all member states understood that there was some profoundly important relationship between economic development, social justice, military expenditures, and the propensity for conflict, a perspective found in both the Covenant and the Charter.

For many years now, the UN has devoted considerable effort to assessing the social and economic impacts of military expenditures. In 1970, at the request of the General Assembly and with the assistance of an international group of experts, Secretary-General U Thant issued a report on the "Economic and Social Consequences of Disarmament" that identified profound economic and social costs of national arms expenditures, costs that were found to be particularly severe for developing countries.

Then in 1987, the General Assembly convened an "International Conference on the Relationship Between Disarmament and Development" that was attended by 150 countries. The conference's Final Document -- which was adopted by consensus -- found that "The world can either continue to pursue the arms race with characteristic vigour or move consciously and with deliberate speed towards a more stable and balanced social and economic development within a more sustainable international economic and political order; it cannot do both." That statement is as valid today as it was when it was issued.

The end of the Cold War in the following decade gave rise to widespread hopes for a bountiful peace dividend as resources would finally be freed to meet compelling economic and social needs. Yet expenditures continued on weapons of mass destruction, the development of new weapons technologies, and on conventional weapons. While it is true that global military expenditure has now declined to some $740 billion, many of the peoples of the United Nations have still seen little of either the dividend or peace.

And what have been the fruits of this massive investment?

Here is what the UNDP's Human Development Report for 1998 had to say about this last decade -- "... armed conflict has killed 2 million children, disabled 4-5 million, and left 12 million
homeless, more than 1 million orphaned or separated from their parents and some 10 million psychologically traumatized." The UNDP report also noted that overall civilian fatalities have risen dramatically in wars over the course of this century.

The opportunity costs of these armed conflicts remain alarming. The UNDP reports that such conflict "... destroys years of progress in building social infrastructure, establishing functioning government institutions, fostering community-level solidarity and social cohesion and promoting economic development." Is it unrealistic to expect that such conditions will only breed new cycles of violence and arms races -- and fresh demands for additional small arms and light weapons?

The Concept of Sustainable Disarmament

Now in 1998 we find ourselves considering the same old conundrum involving development and disarmament that vexed our predecessors, and our attention is drawn inevitably back to the question of, what is sustainable? Sustainable development has been discussed in recent years largely in terms relating to the need to balance economic growth with care for the environment which we hold in trust for future generations. I do not need to elaborate its definition.

But sustainable disarmament is a more elusive concept. The recent nuclear detonations in South Asia underscore the futility of any global security framework that seeks to divide the world permanently into classes of nuclear haves and have nots. History has not been kind to this approach. It failed in 1949, 1952, 1960, 1964, 1974, and again in 1998 -- when additional countries detonated their first nuclear devices. And it failed with respect to other states that acquired bomb capabilities without testing.

The architects of global security for the coming millennium, therefore, can no longer credibly argue that the world has only one choice: between nuclear apartheid and nuclear anarchy. There is indeed a choice to be made, but it is between a nuclear weaponized world and a nuclear weapon free world. And the only sustainable choice is nuclear disarmament.

But what is sustainable with respect to conventional arms? The historian Paul Kennedy has gone so far as to attribute the fall of the greatest of powers to excessive arms expenditures. And the impact of excessive arms in poor countries is even more tragic, as the UNDP has shown. Such arms not only limit social and economic options in such societies but increase the risks and costs of violence, a dynamic which is worsened by the constant acquisition of additional arms. Though Article 51 of the Charter clearly recognizes the inherent right to self-defense, Article 26 identifies the additional -- and I believe sustainable -- goal of promoting this security "with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources."

Not every country can choose to dispense with a standing army, but those who have made that choice or who have limited their military expenditures to reasonable levels surely have more secure neighbors. Similarly, a fully de-alerted nuclear arsenal is less of a threat to a potential
adversary than an arsenal poised to launch on warning. And the declaratory policies of no-first use and negative security assurances also build confidence if they are perceived as credible and as bridges to nuclear disarmament, rather than as artifices to perpetuate an asymmetrical status quo. It is not difficult therefore to distinguish what is sustainable from what is unsustainable in the realm of security policy.

But what are the requisites of sustainable disarmament? What will prevent this concept from becoming a will-o’-the-wisp?

Sustainable disarmament can persist as a security concept if it becomes institutionalized, at both the national and international levels -- its success will require sustained efforts that only organizations can orchestrate. Sustainable disarmament cannot implement itself -- it requires an infrastructure, but not world government. Institutions influence the supply and demand for arms -- there is no reason why institutions cannot also affect the supply and demand of disarmament initiatives.

Sustainable disarmament must appeal to the ideals and self interests of a diverse spectrum of groups in society, especially key "opinion-leading" groups in government, industry, academia, the public interest community, and the news media. It must fire the imagination. The very term "sustainable disarmament" must enter the lexicons of conventional political discourse.

Sustainable disarmament would benefit from some expression in law -- again both national and international -- and in the elaboration of governmental rules, regulations, and policies that advance the disarmament objective.

Sustainable disarmament must be susceptible to various techniques of measurement, for society must be able to gauge the extent to which it is achieving its disarmament goals. If we have indices of sustainable development, we can surely have indices of sustainable disarmament -- such as the creative suggestion from Germany for a nuclear weapons register. If we require other policies to satisfy standards of efficiency and effectiveness, so should our policies of disarmament be regularly assessed both inside and outside of government.

Sustainable disarmament must ensure that international society will collectively discourage -- or at least not reward -- behavior that is inconsistent with disarmament norms. Advocates of sustainable disarmament must concern themselves, in other words, not just with creating a norm but with practical methods of maintaining it.

In summary, what ultimately makes disarmament sustainable are the benefits it brings to people throughout society, the constituencies that develop a stake in maintaining such benefits, and the consistency of such a policy with public ideals.

**Small Arms: A Problem of Transnational Dimensions**
Achieving such goals will not be easy. This is especially true as new problems keep arising that defy solution by any one nation, problems that often attend the process of "globalization." Speaking last January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Secretary-General called them "problems without passports" -- and of these, surely few are more challenging than the problem of curbing the illicit production, sale, and use of small arms and light weapons.

Kosovo. Northern Ireland. Haiti. The Republic of Congo. Rwanda. Burundi. Somalia. Mozambique. Afghanistan. Cambodia. These are just some of the countries from virtually all the regions of the world whose hopes for growth and prosperity are being stifled by chronic conflicts involving massive quantities of small arms and light weapons. Even some countries with highly developed and stable economies are discovering that they too harbor groups that are armed to the teeth with some of the most lethal military technology.

The challenges facing governments, international organizations, and nongovernmental groups that wish to curb the trafficking or stockpiling of such so-called conventional arms are enormous. Though arms alone may not be to blame for causing wars, it would be difficult indeed to deny that the illicit accumulation or use of such weapons have played significant roles as a cause or catalyst of many of international society's most chronic conflicts.

And the weapons themselves and the ammunition that they require are readily available, at cheap prices, and from multiple sources. They are frequently smuggled, and the modest profits from primary markets often get multiplied in secondary and tertiary markets. Though these weapons are already quite deadly enough, they continue to get more lethal each year through an almost inexorable process of technological innovation, including improvements in accuracy, firepower, mobility, and ease of concealment.

These weapons have proliferated both widely and deeply in society today -- they are finding their way not just to more countries but to more private arsenals within those countries including -- but not limited to -- militia groups, drug cartels, and organized crime syndicates, creating an insidious and pervasive "gun culture." The manufacturers, transshippers, and even original buyers of these weapons often do not know who will ultimately use them. And this is particularly hard on the weakest in our global society. Here is what the Secretary-General had to say recently about this problem in his recent Report to the General Assembly on the Work of the Organization:

In the struggle for sustainable peace and development, especially in subregions where state structures are fragile, steps need to be taken to curb the flow of small arms circulating in civil society. It is estimated that 90 per cent of those killed or wounded by light military weapons are civilians and, most shockingly, that 80 per cent of those are women and children.

Yet this grim picture that I have just offered does not tell the whole story, not by any means. It depicts pains . . . but not gains. It provides a sobering reminder of the challenges that lie
ahead, but fails to recognize the enormous creative energies that are now being unleashed throughout international society to end this carnage.

Indeed, I would argue that it is not so much the shortage of good ideas -- but their coordination -- that constitutes the greatest challenge to those seeking to advance our collective international security and disarmament goals. At virtually all levels of political life today -- state, regional, and global -- initiatives for curbing the arms trade or its consequences are proliferating almost at a daily pace.

I cannot begin to recount all of the farsighted initiatives that I see each day emerging from governments, nongovernmental organizations, regional institutions, and from inside the UN itself. My Department maintains an evolving compendium of these initiatives which when completed we will place on our small arms web page. Though even the most zealous proponents of these initiatives do not go so far as to call them panaceas, surely nobody can doubt that the military, political, and economic problems created by small arms and light weapons are receiving a higher priority both within and between governments today. I would now like to review briefly just a few of the more interesting efforts that are underway on the regional and global levels.

**Progress at the Regional Level**

With respect to the Americas, I believe that the recent entry into force of the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials marks an important step forward for regional peace and security, and may well offer a model for similar progress elsewhere.

In Europe, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the European Union recently agreed to a code of conduct on arms exports aimed at curbing the supply of lethal equipment to regimes likely to use them for internal repression or external aggression. The code will also create a mechanism for EU governments to consult and inform each other about such decisions in order to ensure that an ethical stance adopted by one state is not undercut by others. On 3 August 1998, thirteen European countries outside the EU aligned themselves to the criteria and principles contained in the code.

And in Africa, the moratorium initiated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the trade and manufacture of small arms has been widely praised, as has the role of the government of Mali -- led by President Konare -- on behalf of this moratorium. Though much progress remains to be achieved both in destroying arms and in limiting arms trafficking in the Great Lakes region, the UN Security Council approved a resolution last April to re-establish the International Commission of Inquiry into Arms Flows into Central Africa. The UN Secretary-General's report last April to the Security Council on "The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa" contains several useful recommendations to achieve these goals.
A Positive Agenda for the United Nations

In the United Nations, a number of initiatives have either been offered or are under active consideration --

- On 28 July 1998, the Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution submitted by one of its functional commissions -- the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice - recommending that States work towards the elaboration of an international instrument to combat the illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in firearms, their parts and components and ammunition within the context of a United Nations convention against transnational organized crime. This convention is expected to be finalized by the end of the year 2000.
- The UN's Conventional Arms Register contained data from 92 countries this year -- the most ever -- and for the first time published data on national military procurements. I hope that an agreement will someday be reached to expand the register's reporting categories, and that the register will continue its steady progress toward more universal participation.
- The UN also has several expert groups (on the UN Register, on Small Arms, and on Ammunition and Explosives) working on related problems. At the request of the General Assembly, a new Group of Governmental Experts is now working on a second report to the General Assembly on small arms, which will be submitted next year. The UN's central role in this area was recognized at a ministerial meeting at the UN on 25 September concerning the "Oslo Platform" - a 21-country initiative to address the humanitarian, developmental and security concerns raised by small arms.
- The World Bank is also taking an interest in financing post-conflict disarmament measures. James Wolfensohn, the Bank's President, has recently written that "The sustainable reconstruction of countries emerging from long periods of conflict is a challenge we ignore at our peril . . . This is not an issue we can relegate to the sidelines of development." The Bank is helping to finance demobilization, the reintegration of combatants into civil society, and mine clearance activities. The Bank also now has a Post-Conflict Fund to address such challenges.
- The UN is also expanding public awareness of the small arms threat. The actor, Michael Douglas -- an official UN "Messenger of Peace" -- delivered an address on small arms proliferation at the UN on September 25. He spoke at an NGO meeting that was cosponsored by the Permanent Missions of Canada and Norway. The Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) is considering commissioning a film to document this threat and, in collaboration with UNICEF, we plan an exhibit to focus on small arms and its impact on children.
- And last June, the Secretary-General designated the DDA as the focal point of the UN's diverse activities relating to the control of small arms and light weapons, including activities relating to humanitarian issues and impacts on economic development. To integrate and manage these diverse responsibilities, I have established an internal UN mechanism called "Coordinating Action on Small Arms" (CASA), which had its first meeting in August and now meets regularly. CASA is intended to serve five goals in the UN system: to coordinate small arms control activities throughout the UN system; to set
reasonable priorities; to encourage public advocacy of efforts to address small arms issues; to increase the UN's ability to provide assistance to countries that seek such help; and to advance the UN's broader disarmament goals.

- The DDA expects to reinvigorate the work of the UN's Regional Disarmament Centres in Lima, Lome, and Kathmandu, all of which have important roles to play in addressing small arms issues.
- In the coming year, it is my intention to convene a global workshop on the impact of military expenditures on the world economy. I have already started to explore the possibilities of operationalizing an integrated approach to disarmament and development in specific situations such as Albania, where the Secretary-General sent me on an evaluation mission last June. This was after the Albanian Government sought his help to retrieve nearly 650,000 weapons which had fallen into the hands of its civilian population. I believe that a program of deweaponization of civilians and demobilization of former combatants, which currently faces nearly 20 different countries across the world, will be more sustainable when carried out as a part of a package containing community development projects to create more employment and generate additional income for poorer sections of society, particularly the youth. I hope that this approach will receive encouragement and support from the Brussels Conference which has put forward the prerequisite of sustainability for measures of disarmament as well as development.

Demobilized military personnel are still seeking gainful employment and facing hardships in some parts of the world. Elsewhere, large quantities of weapons have been released into civil societies either as a result of downsizing of military establishments or cessation of armed hostilities. Linkages between criminality, violence and contraband trade are taking a toll wherever societies with fledgling political institutions are in the process of promoting socio-economic development. As more and more such societies turn to the UN for advice and support, we need to be better equipped -- first to understand and then to respond to the requests addressed to us.

I have not even included any mention about the projects offered by single countries, nongovernmental organizations, religious groups, and even proposals offered by individual analysts of international security and disarmament. I simply cannot, in the brief space of this address, do proper justice to all of these proposals.

**Some Common Denominators**

It is not difficult to see that many of the approaches I have just surveyed seek to apply some common tools in achieving their respective goals. Supply-side controls, not surprisingly, rely heavily upon export control laws and regulations, as well as national enforcement mechanisms (both investigatory and judicatory).

These approaches also emphasize the importance of increasing the transparency of the international arms market. Increased availability of basic data about this trade will help in
improving our common understanding of this market, in stimulating public interest in improving controls, and perhaps even in discouraging would-be illicit suppliers from engaging in such trade. Greater intergovernmental cooperation in the sharing of information, including intelligence information, will also help to complement these other efforts.

Though norm-building is a common goal of all of these proposals, so must be the goals of norm-maintenance, norm-fulfillment, and norm-enforcement. If it is truly one of our collective goals to take the profits out of proliferation -- another requirement of sustainable disarmament -- then surely the illicit suppliers must face some credible disincentives for engaging in such activities. Whether the world community will ever be able to work out a system of multilateral sanctions against such suppliers is a difficult diplomatic and political challenge, but one that I hope will receive the attention it deserves.

The Challenge of Coordinating "Sustainable Disarmament"

So let us now take stock of our successes.

We have made considerable progress in elevating small arms and light weapons issues to the top of the agendas of many countries and influential international organizations. We have established some momentum that -- with channeled hard work, discipline, and financial support -- will serve to keep these issues high on the public agenda. We have on the table several imaginative proposals to consider to address chronic problems, and new ones are arriving daily.

Yet we still have an enormous task ahead. Through a process of consensus building, we must ensure that all the initiatives we are deliberating fit into a coherent whole.

We are now in an age when Disarmament has finally taken its rightful place along with Economic Development, Social Justice, and Peace as the most profound challenges facing the world community. We cannot achieve any one of these goals in isolation of -- or at the expense of -- the others. Nor can any one country solve these problems globally. They require a profound commitment on the part of all countries, which implies an extraordinary level of international cooperation and consensus-building.

If we fail to coordinate our efforts, we may someday find ourselves "redoubling our effort when we have forgotten our aim." This was George Santayana's definition of "fanaticism," a scourge that enslaves many minds today and employs small arms in its pursuit.

Since I am speaking today on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I think it is only appropriate for me to recall an additional statement from his recent report on the work of the UN. "Recent experience," he said, "has shown that the quest for international peace and security requires complementary action on two fronts: on the security front, where victory spells freedom from fear; and on the economic and social front, where victory spells freedom from want. Human security and equitable and sustainable development turn out to be two sides..."
of the same coin."

I can think of no better institutional setting for this process of coordination than at the United Nations itself, for it has no rival in terms of its global scope, its legal authority, and its long experience in deliberating solutions to complex international problems.