On behalf of the United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs, I extend to all of you a warm welcome to this Conference on "A Disarmament Agenda for the 21st Century."

Lao Tse once wrote that, "He who accounts all things easy will have many difficulties." As all the distinguished participants at this conference surely recognize, disarmament is not a field for the simple-minded. Its fulfilment requires a long journey, a good compass, some dependable reference points for navigation, a knowledge of natural obstacles, a mastery of both strategy and tactics, a keen sense of humanity's strengths and weaknesses, and an abiding vision of the bountiful benefits to be enjoyed upon reaching the final destination. What Sun Tsu accomplished in the 5th century BC with respect to the Art of War, we too -- all of us, regardless of age, governmental rank, or nationality -- must now resolve to achieve in the 21st century as we seek to master a new historic and urgent challenge, the Art of Disarmament.

In these times, the world faces no greater need than the imperative for progress in this troubled field. The calamitous events of September 11 last year should only serve to redouble our efforts,
not to divert them. Yet our journey is hindered by weapon-based security concepts, conflicts, mounting civilian casualties, and lost opportunities for social and economic progress as growing shares of the world’s treasuries are diverted each year to military uses.

Treaty obligations -- particularly those relating to the disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, along with their associated multilateral regimes and institutions -- together offer us the signposts we must all follow on our long common journey ahead. Yet our collective efforts are hindered by the rise of unilateral actions in both these areas that jeopardize the common effort. This conference has therefore been conceived as an opportunity for innovative thinking among high-level representatives of Governments, Parliaments, academia and civil society together. The existing machinery to negotiate and implement disarmament norms is being neglected. There is an urgent need in the new millennium and new century to revitalize the quest for multilateral disarmament as the most certain route to international peace and security.

It is highly appropriate, therefore, that the first item on the agenda focuses on the issues of doctrines, disarmament, and the United Nations. Security doctrines are much more than words alone -- they serve many States as guides to action. They function as roadmaps. They assist leaders of States to interpret information and to explain such information to their publics. Given these important roles, doctrines that prescribe the actual use of nuclear weapons must receive especially close attention by all who are concerned about the journey to global nuclear disarmament.

The United Nations Charter and the Millennium Declaration offer alternative roadmaps that emphasize the importance of the peaceful resolution of disputes, the obligation to avoid the threat or use of force, the role of social and economic development as a path to peace, and the need for progress on disarmament. Our journey, in short, has come to a crossroads, and the world must choose which guide it wishes to follow -- I hope that the deliberations on this agenda item will result in new insights that will enable the world community to choose its future path wisely.

The second agenda item focuses on the global challenges of eliminating nuclear weapons and their associated dangers to humankind. The global nature of the market for weapons-usable nuclear materials and the technologies to produce them, the global scope of the implications of nuclear war, and the global reach of the desire on the part of all of humanity to eliminate such weapons -- these considerations compel a truly global response. Four years ago, analysts at the Brookings Institution estimated that the total historical cost of United States efforts in the field of nuclear weapons was around $5.8 trillion. They calculated that if configured as a stack of one-dollar bills, this stack would rise a distance of 459,000 miles -- this is over a hundred times the length of the Great Wall. This figure did not include the additional expenses on nuclear weapons by other states -- not to mention the horrific human and economic costs that would be associated with any actual use of such weapons. Yet as high as these figures may be, the taxpayers of the world may soon be facing even more burdens that will be astronomical in more
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This brings me to the third item on the agenda: the danger that our earth-bound arms races will one day -- perhaps one day soon -- escalate to extra-terrestrial dimensions. In multilateral forums such as the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and the United Nations General Assembly in New York, several countries including China have called for an international treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The benefits of such an approach and the obstacles it faces merit close scrutiny -- but needed most of all is a searching inquiry into specific practical initiatives to overcome these obstacles. There is little doubt that the world must succeed in this area, for a future arms race in space would have profound implications for international peace and security. It would influence the course of arms races here on Earth, it would affect how even conventional weapons are developed and used, and it would inevitably affect the sharing and distribution of the benefits from the peaceful uses of outer space.

This danger of an arms race in outer space relates closely to the fourth item on the agenda -- missile proliferation and missile defence. On 15 April 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a statement challenging the world community to get to work on some multilateral norms in both of these areas. A year later, the General Assembly approved a resolution that asked the Secretary-General to prepare -- with the assistance of a panel of governmental experts -- a report on missiles in all its aspects. This panel gathered yesterday in New York to start its second session and will meet once again in July before concluding its work. The Secretary-General will submit his report to the General Assembly at its fifth-seventh session later this year.

Ladies and gentlemen, these preliminary efforts with respect to missiles represent the first steps of a long journey ahead to address some of the most difficult challenges for international peace and security. The world will not reach the end of this road until States take many more steps in the development of multilateral norms in these fields. Recognizing the costs of failure to fulfil this ambitious goal, your challenge in this Conference is to identify and to explore various ways and means of building such norms and ensuring their implementation in the years ahead.

Conventional weapons issues are the focus of the last, but by no means the least significant, agenda item for this Conference, with a particular emphasis on the "revolution in military affairs," confidence-building measures, and regional approaches to disarmament. Last year, the historic United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects reached a consensus on a "Programme of Action" to address one important dimension of this larger problem. While there is much work to do -- not just in implementing this mandate but also in building upon it -- there is even more work to do with respect to the development of multilateral norms with respect to other conventional arms.

The endless qualitative improvements underway to perfect the accuracy and lethality of conventional weapons may lead one day to new weaponry that could rival small nuclear weapons in their effects. Will this contribute to the further obsolescence of nuclear weapons -- or more likely, to parallel arms races involving both types of weaponry? I hope this panel will focus
in particular on how the world community can obtain further information about the production and international transfer of such arms, including -- among other approaches -- greater use of the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

I would like to conclude my opening remarks today on a personal note. When I wore -- as they say -- a younger man's clothes, I studied Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and later served in Beijing as a member of the Foreign Service of Sri Lanka. Over the years, I have developed a deep appreciation for China's rich history, culture, philosophy, and literature. I was attracted in particular to the writings of your great poet, Li Po. As this conference gets underway in the first few days of a new Spring, I can think of no more inspirational way to commence this event than by recalling his poem, "Clearing at Dawn" --

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\begin{align*}
\text{The fields are chill, the sparse rain has stopped;} \\
\text{The colours of Spring teem on every side.} \\
\text{With leaping fish the blue pond is full;} \\
\text{With singing thrushes the green boughs droop.} \\
\text{The flowers of the field have dabbled their powdered cheeks;} \\
\text{The mountain grasses are bent level at the waist.} \\
\text{By the bamboo stream the last fragment of cloud} \\
\text{Blown by the wind slowly scatters away.}
\end{align*}
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In a spirit of gratitude for the extensive efforts from the Chinese side in the preparations for this Conference, I wish all participants well in blowing away the last clouds from the field of disarmament, so that we can all enjoy the delights of a bright new Spring to come, in a safer and more secure world for all.