I would like to begin by thanking the Chairman for inviting me to address an extremely important issue relating to the work of this Committee -- namely, the implementation of its resolutions. This is, of course, not a new concern of this Committee. The tenth special session of the General Assembly -- the first such session to focus specifically on disarmament -- addressed this issue in 1978, though even then the Committee had a longstanding interest in various questions of implementation. Throughout its history, the Committee has had to maintain a delicate balance between a common commitment to principles, and the need for practical initiatives to address
The Future Role of the United Nations in Asian Peace and Security

contemporary security challenges.

As the Cold War faded into history, the Committee’s interest in implementation grew with respect to many items on its agenda, especially non-proliferation and disarmament. In recent years, the First Committee has annually adopted over fifty resolutions and decisions addressing a full gamut of issues in the field of international peace and security. While the very act of adopting these measures is part of a broader, agenda-building function of the General Assembly, the real significance of such resolutions cannot be judged simply by the frequency with which they have been repeated over the years. The process of adopting these resolutions is not -- and must not be allowed to become -- an end in itself. As I see it, the Committee is determined to sustain this balance between its pronounced principles and the practicalities of implementation. It must ensure that one is not sacrificed for the other.

Though some resolutions lend themselves more readily than others to practical steps of implementation, even those resolutions that address more abstract or longer-term goals can benefit from agreements on concrete measures to achieve such goals. There is a growing awareness in the Committee that resolutions seeking to achieve specific ends through practical means stand a better chance of actually getting implemented than those that do not. I note in this respect that several Member States expressed such views in the Secretary-General’s most recent report to the General Assembly on “Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee” (A/59/132). This support for a more “results-oriented” focus of these resolutions offers great potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of this Committee.

One important function of the Department of Disarmament Affairs is to assist the Secretary-General in preparing reports to the General Assembly containing the views of Member States on disarmament-related issues. Unless specifically requested, Department has no mandate to evaluate such views in preparing these reports, nor does it have a formal responsibility to undertake substantive assessments of the implementation of specific disarmament initiatives. We are, however, prepared to provide the Committee with an overview of the relevant work of the Secretariat in implementing these resolutions and to present some findings with respect to these reports.

In response to requests from the General Assembly for the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on various disarmament-related issues, the Department is responsible for sending the appropriate notes verbales at the beginning of the year reminding Member States of the decisions taken by the General Assembly and setting deadlines for providing information. We have assisted both substantively and administratively the work of numerous expert groups established by the Secretary-General at the request of the General Assembly to address specific challenges. In addition, the Department provides services to multilateral treaty conferences and
meetings pursuant to General Assembly resolutions. As a part of the Secretariat’s efforts to rationalize its work, we have also succeeded in consolidating reports on similar issues -- the 24 reports submitted in the 58th Session, for example, derived from 30 such requests.

Of these 24 reports, 13 contained the views of individual Member States on specific issues, as requested by the relevant resolutions. The first -- and most general -- conclusion from a review of these reports is that relatively few Member States responded to the Secretary-General’s requests for their views. Even with respect to the report with the greatest number of responses -- relating to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms -- over a third of all Member States did not reply. One report -- dealing with conventional arms control at the regional and sub-regional levels -- only had one response from the 191 Member States.

We found that ten of these reports each contained the individual views of less than twenty Member States. This low level of response clearly undercuts the ability of these reports to provide a wide-ranging representation of the views of Member States. I should also note that in some cases even the main sponsors of the resolutions requesting these reports did not respond to the Secretary-General’s requests for their views. Two reports did not contain the views of any of their main sponsors, while another eight reports each had less than ten replies from their sponsors. The record for the previous 57th Session shows a similar overall pattern.

The subject of conventional arms figured most prominently in responses the Secretary-General received from Member States. For example, the report on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms contained the replies of 121 Member States. The only other report containing the views of more than half the Member States dealt with the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, with 103 replies. The resolution with the third highest number of responses dealt with “objective information on military matters, including transparency of military expenditures” had 76 replies, with sixty percent of the Member States not providing their views.

In this respect, I would like to note that the Department has organized workshops and has undertaken other activities to promote greater participation in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and greater use of the Standardized Instrument for Reporting Military Expenditures. It is perhaps no coincidence that these were specifically the issues with the highest levels of responses by Member States. We have also assisted Member States -- both here in New York and in the field through our regional centres -- in implementing the Programme of Action agreed at the 2001 United Nations Conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. This was another subject that figured prominently in reports by Member States.

I must caution that these general statistics refer to views provided by individual Member States, not reports submitted on behalf of regional groups of states. Only four reports, however, contained such en bloc reporting of views, so the general finding about limited replies remains
valid. I note also that the mere frequency of reporting is no indication of the quality of the individual reports -- as the old saying goes, words are better weighed than counted.

These figures do not in any way challenge the substantive merits of the resolutions creating the requests for reports. They do, however, suggest either a need for Member States to examine more carefully the requests for reports or to increase their responsiveness to the Secretary-General’s requests for their views. Though the requirements for reports, like the resolutions including them, are non-binding, it is difficult to conclude that the low rate of response to these requests is satisfying any “results-based” standard, however defined.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I have stressed the importance of broadening participation in the submission of national reports because I believe detailed reporting provides an indispensable foundation for accountability. There can be no “results-based” analysis of these resolutions without facts about their implementation. Reports are an essential means for Member States to signal to other Member States and to civil society what they are doing on behalf of the goals of the many resolutions and decisions adopted each year by this Committee. They provide the feedback needed to assess progress in achieving the solemn goals of these resolutions, and to modify such resolutions as needed to focus them on more precise objectives. This applies regardless of the issue -- whether it concerns efforts to curb the illicit trade in small arms, to promote controls over other conventional arms, to keep terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, to pursue nuclear disarmament, to promote multilateralism, to enhance transparency, or to advance any other worthy goals of these resolutions. Indeed, this also applies to all resolutions adopted by the General Assembly.

While the ability of the Department of Disarmament Affairs to assess the extent that Member States are implementing the Committee’s resolutions is constrained by the Department’s limited mandate, budget, and personnel resources, the Department stands ready to assist the Committee in undertaking any such assessments as it may decide to request, to the best of its abilities. I hope that my preliminary assessment of the implementation of resolutions containing reporting responsibilities will assist the Committee in its ongoing reform deliberations.

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