Distinguished Members of the Board,

Allow me first to welcome all of you to the 49th session of the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters and, in particular, I wish to welcome our eight new members: Ambassador Nobuyasu Abe, Dr. Dewi Fortuna Anwar, Ambassador CHENG Jingye, Dr. Kate Dewes, Dr. Monica Herz, Ambassador Palihakkara, Professor Olga Pellicer and Ambassador Carlo Trezza. I am certain that each of these new members will be able to contribute significantly to the work of the Board.

I would also like to congratulate Professor Adam Rotfeld upon his appointment as the Advisory Board’s Chairperson for 2008 and to assure him of the full support and cooperation of the Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA). At the same time, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Ambassador Ho-Jin Lee for his outstanding chairmanship last year which allowed the Board to successfully conclude its work on the items on its agenda. I also thank the Board for its recommendations, which the Secretary-General conveyed to the General Assembly at its 62nd session.

As you are aware, the Advisory Board was established in 1978 pursuant to paragraph 124 of the Final Document of the Tenth Special Session of the General Assembly. Over those years, the Board and its many members have made important contributions to the cause of disarmament and non-proliferation. Nonetheless, the field of multilateral disarmament has witnessed too many setbacks in recent years.

This is why the need to strengthen the role of the UN disarmament machinery, including the Advisory Board, has become more pressing than ever. It is in this context that the Secretary-General decided that it would be preferable for the Board to have sufficient time to discuss the same two or three agenda items during both its winter and summer sessions each year rather than exchanging views on two or more new agenda items during each session as was done in recent years. This improved method of work would allow the Board members to have more in-depth discussions on the agenda items as well as to make more concrete and practical recommendations to the Secretary-General. The inter-sessional period would also provide members with sufficient time to think over the views exchanged during this February session and to develop recommendations to the Secretary-General by the time the Board meets again in July for its summer session.

This year, the Board has on its agenda three important items to consider, namely i) Issues of energy security and environment in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation; ii) The ‘Hoover Plan’ for nuclear disarmament: multilateralism and the UN dimension; and iii)
Emerging weapons technologies, including outer space aspects, the latter being a continuation of discussions from last year’s session.

You may recall that the first item was among one of the several possible topics for discussion in 2008 considered by the Board at its 48th session last year. Although views differed on whether to look at the issue in the broader context of global security or in a narrower context of existing multilateral disarmament treaties, the ever rising global demand for energy and the ensuing competition for energy resources may have a significant impact on international peace and security and thus, merits consideration by the Board.

The second item is related to the “Hoover Plan”, a nuclear disarmament proposal launched last year by former US officials George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. The proposal, which followed a conference at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, has since been supported by several other former officials and has been the subject of additional conferences. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I addressed this group at its October 2007 conference and, next week in Oslo, I will attend another conference that has been organized by the Government of Norway, the Hoover Institution, and the Nuclear Threat Initiative. The goal of the Plan is not just to promote the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, but also to identify specific steps to achieve it. The Board could exchange views on this non-UN initiative and explore its implications relative to the United Nations’ own efforts in multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

As for the third item on emerging weapons technologies, the Board discussed this agenda item last year and made three recommendations to the Secretary-General. Nonetheless, given the complex nature of the issue of emerging weapons technologies that may have a significant impact on global security, including outer space issues, it was deemed useful for the Board to continue its discussion on the item. I am sure that our new members will be able to provide interesting input on the issue.

To help set the context for our work, I will now to provide you with a brief overview of some of the important events on the disarmament calendar for this year.

The Conference on Disarmament held its inaugural plenary meeting of its 2008 Session on 23 January. The Secretary-General personally addressed the meeting, renewing his call for to Member States of the CD to make compromises in order to begin the negotiations towards an FMCT and to focus on other key issues. The Conference is continuing its efforts to reach a consensus on a programme of work, a perennial challenge for the CD throughout the last decade.

Last year, the vast majority of the Conference supported a programme of work that was jointly proposed by its six rotating presidents, known as draft Presidential Decision L.1, which would have allowed negotiations to begin on a fissile material treaty, while launching substantive discussions on the three other core issues. Unfortunately, no final agreement was reached.
In a bid to break this impasse, the Secretary-General appealed to the CD Members to move forward with draft Presidential Decision L.1 and called for leadership in forging a fresh consensus. The Secretary-General’s presence at the inaugural meeting, along with the participation of other high-level political leaders in later meetings helped to increase the political profile of the Conference. You may also recall that at one of those meetings, the UK’s Secretary of State for Defence stated that his country wanted to be seen as a “laboratory” for developing measures to verify nuclear disarmament. Yet a consensus on L.1 remains elusive as several Members continue to object to commencing negotiations on only one of the CD’s priority issues.

On 12 February, China and the Russian Federation officially submitted to the Conference a draft treaty entitled “Treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against outer space objects”. The draft was presented with a research mandate, in order not to complicate further the difficult situation at the CD, but it could be transferred to a negotiating mandate if circumstances allow it. The draft included several new elements compared to the working paper (CD/1679) submitted by both countries in 2002.

The United Nations Disarmament Commission will hold the final meeting of its three-year cycle from 7 to 25 April. The Commission is purely deliberative and is seeking to produce a set of recommendations for the two topics of its Working Groups, which are: nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons. With regard to Working Group I on nuclear issues, there has been no agreement on a draft text from the previous two substantive sessions, and it will therefore be a challenge for the group to reach a consensus on a paper by the end of its three-week session this year.

Another important event this year will be the second session of the Preparatory Committee to the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which will occur in Geneva from 28 April to 9 May. The Agenda for the Preparatory Committee was adopted last year, and the States Parties will focus on key substantive issues in preparation for the 2010 Review Conference. The third session, to take place in New York in 2009, will have to deal with procedural and substantive aspects of the 2010 Review Conference.

With respect to biological weapons, the annual meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention was held last December, when the States Parties considered the two substantive topics – ways and means to enhance national implementation, and regional and sub-regional cooperation to implement the treaty. They adopted a report with a “basic guide” to national implementation of the BWC.

As mandated by the Sixth Review Conference, the Implementation Support Unit was established in the Geneva Branch of ODA to support the meetings agreed by the Conference, to assist national implementation, and to promote universal participation in the Convention and confidence-building measures. The Unit, which was fully staffed in August 2007, presented its first report during the 2007 Meeting of States Parties, and its work was widely and highly appreciated.
From 25-29 February, the **UN Panel of Governmental Experts on the Issue of Missiles in All its Aspects** will hold its second meeting out of three. The Panel will hold its third and final meeting from 2 to 6 June, and is seeking to produce a consensus document containing a set of recommendations or guidelines in the field of missiles. As you are well aware, there is still no international treaty or legally binding instrument to regulate the trade in, development of or proliferation of missiles.

Meanwhile, the mandate of the **1540 Committee**, concerning the proliferation or terrorist use of WMD, will expire on 27 April. The Committee will submit to the Security Council a report on compliance, and the Council will then determine whether the mandate will be extended, for how long and under what conditions.

Last year, ODA organized regional workshops in support of Resolution 1540 – in Jordan from 4-5 September and in Botswana, from 27-28 November. These activities reconfirmed that there was a need to organize follow-up thematic workshops, to enhance the capacity of officials involved in implementing the resolution. ODA is also planning other activities for 2008-2009 – including six regional capacity-building workshops – to address the need for capacity-building, particularly in the area of border and export controls.

In the area of conventional weapons, the Meeting last year of the States Parties to the **Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons**, held from 7-13 November in Geneva, decided that the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) will negotiate “a proposal to address urgently the humanitarian impact of cluster munitions, while striking a balance between military and humanitarian considerations”. In Geneva last month, the GGE held the first of five meetings scheduled for 2008. This session identified aspects of the **cluster munitions** problem, and, with the support of experts, produced a draft working definition that will be used in the future work of the Group. The GGE is expected to report to the next meeting of the States Parties in November.

In parallel with such efforts, a large number of States are continuing their efforts to conclude a legally binding treaty to ban cluster munitions by the end of this year. As part of the so-called Oslo process on cluster munitions, these countries are currently meeting in Wellington, New Zealand, from 18-22 February. The participating States are expected to develop common understandings on key elements of a treaty to address the humanitarian impacts of cluster munitions, based on the “Draft Declaration of the Wellington Conference on Cluster Munitions” as well as the text of a “Draft Cluster Munitions Convention.”

Following its entry into force in 2006, the **first Conference of the States Parties to the Protocol V on explosive remnants of war** was held last year in Geneva on 5 November. At the meeting, the States Parties made significant progress by establishing a framework for the exchange of information and cooperation. To minimize risks, the Protocol covers post-conflict remedial measures of a generic nature, and each State party and party to armed conflict shall bear the responsibility to clear explosive remnants of war or to assist in such clearance. On its part, ODA is organizing a number of regional workshops, with financial support from the EU, to assist in promoting the universality of the Convention.
With respect to landmines, the 2007 Meeting of the 156 States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention was held last year in Jordan from 18 to 22 November. Although 39 States have not joined the Convention, including some major possessors and producers, it has contributed significantly to the goal of eliminating anti-personnel land-mines, especially by destroying stockpiles and clearing mined areas.

Almost ten years after its entry into force in March 1999, States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention continue to work on these challenges. The Convention requires each State Party to destroy its stockpile of such mines within four years, and to clear all known mined areas under its jurisdiction or control within 10 years. As a number of States Parties are finding it difficult to meet these deadlines, the States Parties need to address the issues of deadline extensions and assistance.

As you may be aware, in 2006 the General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled: “Towards an arms trade treaty: establishing common international standards for the import, export and transfer of conventional arms.” In response to that resolution, the Secretary-General received views from 100 Member States and two regional organizations. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to establish a Group of 28 Governmental Experts to examine the subject. The Group started its work on February 11th and is expected to conclude a report in August, which will focus on the scope, feasibility and the draft parameters of the proposed treaty. The Board may later wish to consider this issue.

It is gratifying that the UN Register of Conventional Arms has progressed in a relatively new area. The group of governmental experts that reviewed the Register in 2006 agreed on an optional, standardized system for reporting transfers of small arms and light weapons. As a result of this development, almost 40 Member States reported on such transfers, rising from a level of 6 Member States in the previous year.

There has also been progress towards strengthening the UN standardized system for reporting military expenditures. In December last year, the General Assembly adopted without a vote a resolution that requests the Secretary-General to establish a group of governmental experts to review the operation and further development of the existing system for reporting defense spending. We expect that the review, which is scheduled to commence in 2010, will facilitate the further progress of this instrument, which was last reviewed some 25 years ago.

In connection with the Programme of Action on small arms, we have a challenge in front of us. As you know, every meeting held after the PoA was established failed to achieve meaningful results. Last December, the General Assembly decided that the next Biennial Meeting of States (BMS) should be held this year from 14 to 18 July. Resolution 62/47 called upon States to take full advantage of this event to identify priority issues in implementing the Programme of Action.

Resolution 62/47 also provides for the first review of the implementation of the International Tracing Instrument, to be conducted within the framework of the BMS. In this
connection, ODA has undertaken a number of initiatives, such as the organization of regional workshops, to assist States in their preparations for the review and in reporting on national implementation. The issue of illicit brokering in SALW is also expected to receive special attention at the BMS. This is also reflected in resolution 62/47, which encouraged States to include, in their national reports on the implementation of the PoA, information about their efforts against this illicit brokering and on their actions to enhance international cooperation for that purpose.

Meanwhile, the **Group of Governmental Experts to consider further steps to enhance cooperation with regard to the issue of conventional ammunition stockpiles in surplus** concluded a promising first session of work last January in Geneva. The session was characterized by a positive and constructive atmosphere, which gives me hope that the Group will be able to agree on recommendations to enhance international cooperation on this important subject.

Finally, in July 2007, the UN and the Government of Nepal signed a Host Country Agreement and a Memorandum of Understanding on the relocation of the **UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific** to Kathmandu. ODA has been working closely with the Government of Nepal to ensure a smooth and timely relocation. This relocation will provide a good opportunity for the countries in the region to take true ownership of the Centre by renewing political support and by providing the resources needed to carry out its mandate.

In addition, joint efforts by African States and ODA to revitalize the **UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa** came to fruition with the GA’s approval of funding for additional posts and the operational cost of the Centre from the UN Regular Budget. This encouraging development sets a good precedent for seeking solutions to the chronic resource constraints faced by the three UN Regional Centres in carrying out their respective mandates. In the meantime, the **UN Regional Center for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean** has been continuing its partnerships with member States of the region, regional organizations, as well as the donor community in implementing various projects.

It has always been my conviction that that this Advisory Board is an important component of the UN disarmament machinery. It has played and shall continue to play a vital role in advising the Secretary-General on disarmament matters. As members serving in your personal capacities, you are freer to express your views than in any other UN or other multilateral forum, while acknowledging the need to come up with practical and realistic recommendations for the Secretary-General that would secure broad support from the Member States. The issues on your agenda for this year are both challenging and complex and thus deserve your in-depth consideration. I look forward to hearing your respective views on these issues and wish you all the best so that you may conclude your work successfully.