Opening Statement

By

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I know that I am speaking on behalf of all of us here today by expressing my deep appreciation to President Berdymukhamedov and Foreign Minister Meredov for convening this important international conference. Their presence today testifies to the importance the Government of Turkmenistan attaches to progress in the field of disarmament, which is echoed in country after country worldwide, especially with respect to nuclear disarmament.

While time will not permit me to recognize all the other distinguished participants at this conference, I also wish to thank the organizers for inviting experts and practitioners with considerable knowledge and experience in advancing regional security and disarmament goals.

This is an ideal time to convene such a conference. We are meeting just after the conclusion of a successful Review Conference of the States Parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the first such success in a decade. As this present Conference opens, determined efforts are underway in countries around the world to advance disarmament goals and to build upon past progress.

For 64 years now, the United Nations has been seeking to achieve the elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as the regulation and limitation of conventional armaments. Though much work remains to be done, I believe that these goals possibly enjoy greater support today within the international community than they have received in decades.

Yet strong and persistent support for a goal is not quite the same as an equal commitment to actions to achieve that goal. Perhaps the greatest challenge—not just of this conference, but of our current Age—is to discover the means to bridge the gap between noble goals and the practical means to achieve them.

In this context, I find it especially noteworthy that the central themes of this conference focus on international law and international organization.

The necessity for disarmament to proceed within a framework of international law is clear. We are all familiar with the multilateral criteria that the world community has long agreed must prevail in the implementation of disarmament commitments—including irreversibility, verification, and transparency. It is difficult to comprehend how these can all be achieved without binding legal commitments.

Some have endorsed the model Nuclear Weapons Convention as a response to this challenge. Others have sought a framework of separate mutually-reinforcing instruments. Whichever course the world community takes, it is clear that international law will have a vital role to play in making progress in disarmament both sustainable and permanent. To deny this is to be unrealistic and impractical.
It is equally difficult to imagine the achievement of the great UN Charter goals of disarmament and the regulation of armaments without any role for international organizations—or perhaps I should say the process of international organization. There is much indeed to coordinate and it is inconceivable that these challenges can be achieved strictly by States acting on their own, without the benefits of tools offered to them by international organizations in coordinating common strategies, in deliberating collective responses to challenges, and in promoting understanding and support in civil society.

It is quite fitting to be gathering here in Ashgabat to take up these issues. We are in a region that has been one of the most important in the history of both Asia and Europe, from both an economic and a strategic perspective.

The regional nuclear-weapon-free zone that has recently been established in this region is extremely significant, both as the first such zone to be established entirely north of the Equator, and as a zone surrounded by States with nuclear weapons. The members of this zone have stated unequivocally and categorically that they have no interest or intention to acquire nuclear weapons. Yet they have done much more.

They have demonstrated that a state does not need to possess nuclear weapons to receive international recognition and respect. At a time when some states remain convinced that their international status is a function of their possession of nuclear weapons, the people who live in this region have reason to be proud of their national decisions to become nuclear-weapon-free states. This is a status of the future, a status that will eventually be achieved by all states, if we are all successful in our efforts to promote multilateral progress in disarmament.

So I wish to open this conference on a positive, optimistic note. Together, let us show the world that disarmament is not some unrealistic or impractical dream. Let us show how these terms are more accurately applied to the horrible alternatives to disarmament—the endless arms races, ever-growing military expenditures, new risks of catastrophic accidents, and new dangers for innocent civilians throughout the world. Let us start today to identify a path to a safer and saner world. I wish all participants well in the pursuit of this great and noble goal.