Welcoming the 2011 United Nations Disarmament Fellows

Remarks

By

Sergio Duarte
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

United Nations
3 October 2011
To all of you here today from the 2011 class of Disarmament Fellows – I wish to extend a warm greeting to the United Nations.

Much of what the United Nations does in this field relies directly or indirectly upon our various programmes for education and training.

Our disarmament education efforts reach out to students, researchers, and academicians worldwide. Our UN disarmament interns bring us young minds from graduate schools also around the world, and I am pleased that many such students have retained their interest in disarmament issues—some have gone on to publish and teach in this field.

But the UN Programme of Fellowships in Disarmament has a very special role to play each year, in enabling officials from over twenty countries to deepen their knowledge about the various activities underway in the UN disarmament machinery.

This is truly a unique programme, because it does not simply rely upon textbook lessons, but first-hand opportunities for you to meet with participants in this ever-evolving process of making multilateral disarmament norms.

I am proud that well over 800 public officials from 163 Member States have participated in this programme since its creation after the General Assembly’s first Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 – and am very pleased that many of these officials have come from developing countries, and that many of the Fellows have stayed in this field, with some later serving on national UN delegations.

As you know, the UN disarmament machinery is facing some difficult times – the Conference on Disarmament is continuing its struggle to achieve a consensus that will enable it to commence multilateral disarmament negotiations; the First Committee remains deeply divided on many key resolutions, especially those dealing with nuclear weapons; and the UN Disarmament Commission has been unable to reach agreement on new guidelines or recommendations since 1999.

I hope your meetings, lectures, and discussions here are useful in helping you to understand some of the causes of the difficulties experienced in this machinery. Yet I also hope that you will not just learn of the challenges ahead, but also the potential that these institutions have for advancing multilateral disarmament goals. If we try to imagine how truly global disarmament norms can be established and gain worldwide respect and legitimacy, it soon becomes clear that there really is no substitute for this machinery. So we have to find ways to enable it to perform its historic mandates, for the benefit of all – and I hope you will join in this great cause.

As public officials, you have a unique perspective on disarmament issues – you understand that disarmament must be implemented in a manner that does not
jeopardize national or international security interests. You know that it involves matters of great complexity, often involving the need to overcome difficult political or bureaucratic obstacles. You know that the process of advancing disarmament also involves cultivating partnerships between governments and civil society, which can strengthen the “political will” needed for disarmament efforts to succeed.

I am sure that your work as Disarmament Fellows will help you all in working both in and with this machinery in the years ahead – and I certainly look forward to seeing your own future contributions in moving the multilateral disarmament agenda forward.

Allow me to conclude by extending to you all a warm welcome to the United Nations, and my appreciation for your personal interest in disarmament issues. Please accept my best wishes for success in this field over the years to come.