OPENING STATEMENT

By

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Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters
59th Session

United Nations
New York
27 February 2013
Excellencies. Distinguished members of the Advisory Board. Welcome, all of you, to the United Nations as you commence your 59th Session. Although the Secretary-General is unable to attend this meeting due to foreign travel, you know that he has a personal interest in the items on your agenda and he has asked me to convey to you his best wishes for a very productive session. The Deputy Secretary-General is also unable to join you today due to foreign travel.

The honour therefore falls to me to congratulate Desmond Bowen as he assumes his responsibilities as your new Chairman and to thank Ambassador Hewa Palihakkara for his service as your Chairman last year. As always, my colleagues and I at the UN’s Office for Disarmament Affairs look forward to assisting the Board throughout its work this year.

There is no question that 2013 will be a year of transition for the Advisory Board as ten new members join your ranks. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I wish to thank all ten departing members for their many contributions to the work of the Board and to wish them well in their future pursuits.

All members—whether returning or new—are aware of the difficulties now facing many parts of the United Nations disarmament machinery. These are perhaps best illustrated by the chronic stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament, the difficulties in reaching a consensus in the UN Disarmament Commission, and the deep divisions in the General Assembly’s First Committee on nuclear weapons-related resolutions.

The Board, however, functions in a different part of that machinery and it has some unique roles to play, which I am sure you will perform superbly. Together, you are not intended to serve as just another arena for voicing possibly conflicting governmental policies. You are serving now in your individual capacities.

This is one of the Board’s greatest assets. It enables you to give the Secretary-General your best possible advice in addressing disarmament challenges. You have this independence and I encourage you to use it. As you study the facts and develop recommendations on concrete practical responses, be imaginative and step outside the old conceptual and bureaucratic “bubbles”. Rely on your reason and your experience, not official talking points.

The fresh perspectives and diverse backgrounds of the new members are precisely what the Board will need as it confronts some challenging new issues.

The first item on your agenda concerns relations between nuclear-weapon-free zones in advancing regional and global security. This is a welcome subject for many reasons.
First, the five regional nuclear-weapon-free zones in populated areas around the world have done much to advance both non-proliferation and disarmament goals. We too often forget that such zones were never been intended as ends in themselves, but as “partial measures” contributing to the achievement of global nuclear disarmament. And they have done much over the years to strengthen regional and global security.

Each of these zones has had to grapple with challenges that are in some respects unique to each zone. Yet they also share many common functions, especially in the development of strong multilateral norms against both the possession and proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Given these shared interests, it is not at all surprising that the States that are parties to treaties establishing such zones would recognize the merit of exchanging ideas and sharing experiences in implementing these treaties in their respective regions. These States have already met and I believe the day may soon come when we will be referring to members of these zones as comprising a new collective identity—united in their recognition of the contributions that regional cooperation can make in pursuing global security goals.

Where will this cooperation lead in the years ahead? Are new opportunities on the horizon for deepening that cooperation with collective actions? It may well be the case that the shared ideals and interests of the States parties to these regional treaties have only begun to show their potential as a foundation for collective action in pursuit of both non-proliferation and disarmament goals.

It is a worthy subject indeed for your deliberations, as is the second item on your agenda, concerning the disarmament and security implications of emerging technologies.

Each member of this Board knows why this item is on the agenda, because each member has witnessed the rapid evolution of technological change unfolding all around us with each passing day. Some technologies are revolutionizing the conduct of warfare, involving both conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction. Yet others are revolutionizing the pursuit of disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation goals. Of all the classic multilateral norms that have been prescribed for disarmament agreements—including verification, transparency, irreversibility, universality, and bindingness in law—technological change is having an impact in each of these areas. In some cases, this will be for the better—in others, for the worse.

Because the scope of technological change is so broad, I hope the Board will be able to focus its deliberations on some specific challenges that are both timely and relevant to the concerns of all Member States. These may include unique challenges posed by new weapons delivery systems as well as new technological means of advancing disarmament goals. I realize this is a very difficult and somewhat open-ended
subject, but am confident that this Board can focus on certain subjects that are especially relevant to the United Nations, in terms of its future contributions in maintaining international peace and security while advancing disarmament goals.

Perhaps one of the greatest, though often neglected, challenges that all supporters of disarmament are facing relates to obstacles created by a long-standing shortfall of funds available in this field. This is a crisis that has affected my own Office for Disarmament Affairs and continues to handicap the ability of the UN’s Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) to fulfil its important mandates. As UNIDIR’s Board of Trustees, you all share a keen interest in this issue and I hope you will be able to consider and recommend some constructive steps forward in addressing this additional challenge.

In considering all of the issues on your agenda, I would like to encourage you to be as precise as you can in identifying specific concrete actions that are needed for progress in these fields—including actions by the Secretary-General, the Office of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and other parts of the UN disarmament machinery.

I am sure you all wish for the United Nations to remain what Dag Hammarskjöld once called a “dynamic instrument” in advancing agreed multilateral disarmament norms. Your agreement to serve as Board Members testifies to this basic interest in ensuring that this Organization will continue to make its own unique and valuable contributions in the great division of labour that together constitutes the international process of disarmament.

With these introductory remarks, I wish you well as you commence your new session. I look forward to seeing what this new Board with its new agenda can produce that will point the way for more productive results in the field of disarmament. Your thoughts and recommendations will be most welcome and wish to thank you all for agreeing to serve as Members.