



**Remarks by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
to the final session of the open-ended working group on a fourth special
session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament**

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Chairman, Fernando Luque,

Distinguished members of the Bureau,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to address this body during my first six weeks as the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

At the outset, please allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and all delegations, on the constructive work done by this group over the last year.

Special Sessions on Disarmament, and particularly the first Special Session in 1978, have played an important role in advancing our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. They have provided an opportunity to take stock of the status quo and to devise ways to use the tool of disarmament to make the world both more peaceful and prosperous.

In today's international environment, such thinking on disarmament is clearly required.

I was recently in Vienna for the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the NPT. It was a sharp reminder of the challenges that continue to face the international community in the area of nuclear disarmament.

All nuclear-armed States continue to invest billions in the qualitative improvement of their nuclear weapons, while the pursuit of deeper reductions in nuclear-weapon arsenals seems to have come to a halt. The provocative missiles and nuclear testing, as well as the proliferation concerns on the Korean Peninsula remain prime examples of the danger we are faced with at the regional and global levels.

Challenges to disarmament efforts reach beyond the nuclear field.

The illicit trade in small arms and their ammunition continues to devastate already-fragile societies, hampering their abilities to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The use of

chemical weapons has caused unspeakable human suffering and is undermining the global norm against these unacceptable weapons.

But in spite of all this, I remain optimistic.

I am optimistic partly because of the opportunity for inclusive discussions in forums such as this one. This dialogue is not done in vain, but is essential to building confidence and enhancing cooperation – both of which are critical for facilitating progress in disarmament and non-proliferation.

One example of the importance of disarmament to confidence-building and cooperation is reflected in the growing momentum around the “Sustaining Peace” agenda, as outlined in Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) and General Assembly resolution 70/262. Historically, disarmament and arms control have played an intrinsic role in easing international tensions and maintaining peace and security. Disarmament is also a key enabler of sustainable peace.

The mandate of your working group provides the opportunity to consider the current state of multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control in the context of a possible fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament—or SSOD4.

The special session formulation offers a unique chance to consider not just specific weapon categories, but broad themes of relevance to disarmament, including consideration of trends, developments and new challenges. It provides for a useful blend of looking backwards and forwards within the wider framework of the United Nations’ long-standing objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control.

These are turbulent times. Tensions are rising between nuclear-armed States. Armed conflict has displaced more people than any other time since the Second World War. Revolutionary technology is rapidly transforming our world. If we do not take the proper precautions we risk exposing the vulnerabilities in our increasingly networked planet in ways that could have catastrophic outcomes for the peoples, environment, societies and the global economy. Growing military expenditures, including on advanced weapons systems with strategic capabilities, could, if left unchecked, fuel a new and dangerous arms race.

In this environment, a thorough re-examination of how disarmament can be used as a tool for sustainable peace and conflict prevention is more than merited. Now is the opportunity for an inclusive debate among all States, including about whether our disarmament machinery remains fit for purpose.

I am aware of some divergence of views expressed over the course of the two previous sessions of the working group.

Nonetheless, I call upon all delegations not to shy away from making progress. I note there are several points of convergence between States and that deliberations during the two previous sessions were done in a very constructive atmosphere. I invite delegations to resolutely pursue those points of agreement. I would encourage strategic thinking on recommendations for what would practically facilitate progress in disarmament.

Agreements on substantive recommendations for transmittal to the General Assembly would not only be beneficial for this body, but also for the broader disarmament machinery.

I remarked earlier that despite the challenges, I remain optimistic. I remain so because every time we think the multilateral system is defeated we are given an example that there is still life in it yet. Just over three months ago – to the pleasant surprise of most – the United Nations Disarmament Commission, also a universal body, broke a nearly two-decade stalemate and adopted consensus recommendations for the General Assembly.

Progress is possible. The key now is to build on this momentum and use these dialogues to generate the political will to succeed.

I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

Thank you.