

As prepared for delivery



**Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu at the side event on “Contextualizing
General and Complete Disarmament”**

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New York
18 October 2017

Ambassador Sergio Duarte,
Dr. Dan Plesch,
Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the mission of Chile and the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at SOAS University of London for organising this event.

The importance of general and complete disarmament as the guiding principle for the United Nations cannot be overstated. As a concept, it represents the ultimate fulfilment and implementation of the system of collective security at the heart of the UN Charter.

To the drafters of the Charter, the purpose of this system was nothing less than the elimination of war as an instrument of foreign policy. It was intended as the means by which the Organization was to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

This concept of general and complete disarmament was not a simplistic or utopian vision.

First, the Charter itself is neither a pacifist document nor is it designed to be fully implemented in a world free from conflict and international disputes. Rather, general disarmament was the international condition that was expected to prevail once again following the Second World War. This was also the context in which the Security Council, as the principal organ for the maintenance of international peace and security, was meant to operate and to achieve its full potential.

Second, the negotiations pursued by the Soviet Union and the United States in the 1960s on a general disarmament treaty underscored the seriousness of this objective. Even today, major military powers accept that such a treaty remains the proper end state for all efforts in the field of disarmament.

These are some of the reasons why general and complete disarmament has been regarded as the ultimate objective, ever since the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament proclaimed it as such in 1977.

But while it is clear how general and complete disarmament was meant to fit into the international peace and security architecture, there seems less certainty on why this has proved so difficult to accomplish. A study on this topic could probably fill volumes of academic literature.

In any case, a brief survey of various inter-related trends and developments since the 1970s can point to how this concept needs to be modernized, so it can be seen as a viable solution for the contemporary world. From my perspective, some of the most salient trends include the following.

The first is the break-up of the bi-polar world order, which dominated outcomes in the field of disarmament for over four decades.

Secretary-General Guterres touched upon the significance of this when taking the oath of office. He observed that following the end of the Cold War: “Hidden contradictions and tensions resurfaced. New wars multiplied and old ones reignited. Lack of clarity in power relations led progressively to greater unpredictability and impunity. Conflicts have become more complex — and interlinked — than ever before.”

This new reality challenges the old one-size-fits all approach to disarmament, where agreement between two countries could serve as the basis for a universal treaty. We now have to contend with multiple spheres of power and influence, a growing multiplicity of interests, conflicts and asymmetries, and disarmament machinery hobbled by archaic rules and practices.

The second trend I see relates to the rapid technological progress we have witnessed over the past several decades. Emerging military capabilities, such as drones and in the cyber domain, are lowering political costs for decisions to use force. Increasingly, States and non-states are tempted to conduct hostile and malicious acts in circumstances that they regard as a gray area in the law.

Efforts to pursue the reduction of military budgets has for some time been affected by the integration of the arms industry in the civilian economy. The ceaseless drive for new military technology and capabilities, which is largely led by the private sector, may only exacerbate this dynamic.

A third trend I see is a growing acquiescence for military solutions to solve international problems.

The over-accumulation of arms has a well understood and direct correlation with the resort to the use of force. For instance, since 1999 the Security Council has discussed the destabilizing effect of the accumulation of small arms and light weapons, including both as a standalone item and as part of its consideration of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. There is also growing interest in addressing the problem posed by unsafe and unsecured ammunition stockpiles.

However, the impact of heavy conventional weapons and explosives, which are responsible for the largest share of casualties caused by armed conflict, has not yet received the full attention it requires.

Particularly in light of these trends, I very much welcome efforts like this one aimed at taking on the big questions from a comprehensive and integrated perspective. The concept of general and complete disarmament, which was born as an approach to reinforce and complement the international peace and security architecture of the UN Charter, needs to be better understood and perhaps to be redefined in the 21st Century security environment. I am also glad to see that this event is organized around UNODA Occasional Paper 28. In this regard, particular thanks are owed to Dr. Plesch for continuing to promote this paper as a basis for discussions on bringing general and complete disarmament into the 21st Century.

With this introduction, I hope you have a rich and productive exchange at this event.

Thank you very much.