

**United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan's Address to the
Conference on Disarmament
Geneva, Switzerland, 21 June 2006**

Following is the address by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan which he delivered today to the Conference on Disarmament at the Palais des Nations in Geneva:

“I very much welcome this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament. Last month, at the University of Tokyo, I spoke about the present state of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. I said then that the world stood at a crossroads. I believe that description applies with particular force to this body, and so I would like to use our time together today to make an appeal to you – and through you, to the governments you represent.

As members of the Conference on Disarmament, you know as well as anyone that we face two very divergent courses. One path – the path of active engagement -- can take us to a world in which the proliferation of nuclear weapons is restricted and reversed through trust, dialogue and negotiated agreement.

The other leads to a world in which a growing number of States feel obliged to arm themselves with nuclear weapons, and in which non-State actors acquire the means to carry out nuclear terrorism.

The international community seems almost to be sleepwalking down that latter path -- not by conscious choice, but rather through miscalculation, sterile debate and paralysis of the very multilateral mechanisms created for confidence-building and conflict-resolution.

But if any single group has the collective power to wake the world up to that danger, it is the Conference on Disarmament, which for many years pioneered global efforts to control the spread of deadly weapons. And if ever there was a time to break the prolonged impasse that has stymied your work, and bring disarmament back into the limelight of the international agenda, it is now, in the aftermath of two very recent and very high-profile failures.

Twice last year, Governments had a chance, I repeat, a chance to strengthen the foundations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty – first at the Review Conference in May, and then at the World Summit in September. Both times, they failed. This sent a terrible signal -- of waning respect for the Treaty’s authority, and of a dangerous rift on a leading threat to peace and prosperity.

At such times, we would do well to remember what the Treaty has achieved. With near universal membership, it has entrenched a norm against nuclear proliferation. And it has helped to confound President Kennedy’s famous prediction that, by now, there would be 25 or more countries with nuclear weapons. The success of the NPT, the global support it enjoys, and its resilience, too often pass unremarked.

But that should not blind us to the crisis facing the Treaty – a twin crisis, of compliance and of confidence. Today, the contract between the nuclear weapon States and the rest of the international community, which is the basis of the NPT, has been called into question. And while there has been some progress toward disarmament, nuclear weapons worldwide still number in the thousands, many of them on hair-

trigger alert. If we want to avoid a cascade of nuclear proliferation, we need a major international effort.

There is a need to build a common understanding of the most immediate nuclear threats. The debate between those who insist on disarmament before further non-proliferation measures, and those who argue the opposite, is self-defeating. It should be self-evident that both are essential for security.

We must devalue the currency of nuclear weapons. Japan is one country that has shown that security and status need not be equated with possession of nuclear weapons. South Africa destroyed its arsenal and joined the NPT. Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan gave up nuclear weapons from the former Soviet nuclear arsenal and joined the NPT. And Libya recently abandoned its nuclear and chemical weapons programmes. I urge other countries to resist the perceived allure of nuclear weapons.

We must also resolve two specific situations. The impasse on the Korean Peninsula is especially disappointing given last September's agreement, in the six-party talks, which included a set of principles for a verifiable denuclearization of the Peninsula. I hope the leaders of the DPRK will listen to what the world is telling them, and take great care not to make the situation on the Peninsula even more complicated. Iran, for its part, needs to enable the IAEA to assure the world that its nuclear activities are exclusively peaceful in nature. In both cases, we need solutions that are not only peaceful, but that buttress the NPT's integrity.

The NPT has proved an effective instrument. It is an achievement worth strengthening. And the Conference on Disarmament has a central role to play in that effort.

The Conference and its predecessors have registered some truly important gains. Indeed, the world's security architecture rests on the major treaties on weapons of mass destruction negotiated by this body. But the last such success – the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty – was nine years ago, I repeat, was nine years ago – and it has still not entered into force. Once again I urge those States whose ratification is still needed to take action as soon as possible.

Since then, the Conference has been barren of achievement. So to the twin crises I mentioned earlier I would add another: the stalemate faced by the Conference itself.

But, as at any such moment, there is no shortage of ideas and efforts aimed at re-thinking today's security challenges and charting a way forward.

The recent report of the independent Commission chaired by Hans Blix merits serious consideration by the international community. Later this year, a UN Panel of Government Experts on Verification, chaired by John Barrett of Canada, will present its report to the General Assembly.

Much is expected from the seven-nation initiative led by Norway. And my own Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, chaired by Professor Joy Ogwu of Nigeria, is meeting this week here in Geneva. We must draw together the fruits of these separate efforts, in order to maximize their impact.

This Conference itself, I am pleased to note, appears much readier than it has been in recent years to make a contribution. One can sense that a new momentum is gathering.

For the first time in a decade, you are working to an agreed schedule, with the result that there are structured debates on key issues. Scientific and other experts are playing an active role. Your meetings are more intense and considerably more frequent, thanks to the continuity and coherence forged by successive Presidents of the Conference. And you have made particular efforts to reflect the security concerns of all states.

I know that you have before you proposals and ideas from China and the Russian Federation on the prevention of the weaponization of outer space.

You also have before you the elements of a ground-breaking instrument on halting the production of fissile materials for weapons purposes. And yesterday, President Bush submitted three important instruments for ratification by the US Congress. These moves by the United States are a promising sign and one which I welcome. It could also help strengthen the NPT and the disarmament regime.

I hope that these steps represent the beginnings of a new period of productivity. It is long overdue for this negotiating body to abandon the all-consuming linkages that have dominated your approach in recent years, and get down to substantive work. I do not discount the depth of the difficulty that you face in settling longstanding differences, especially over nuclear disarmament and negative security assurances. Yet those difficulties pale into insignificance, when measured against the immense challenges that the global community faces in the broader sphere of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control.

Let me stress, in closing, the wider backdrop for your work. The United Nations of the 21st century is determined to move forward on three fronts simultaneously – security, development and human rights. These are inextricably linked; they depend on and reinforce one another.

Toward that end, Member States have created a new Human Rights Council, which has begun work this week, in another part of this Palace, to bring a fresh start to our efforts for human dignity. World leaders have endorsed the Millennium Development Goals as a blueprint for a fairer and sustainably prosperous world. Your challenge, I repeat, your challenge is to rise to the security part of that mission, and help ensure that security policies really do make the world safer and more peaceful -- not threatening whole societies with annihilation, but making human rights and development more attainable for all.

So I urge you to put your differences and well-rehearsed arguments behind you, and rise to the task. The hour is late and the choice is clear. With political will, this Conference can reclaim its former mantle and generate tangible benefits that could shape the course of history. That is the challenge, that is your challenge. Thank you very much”.

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