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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

STATEMENT TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT
Geneva, 19 May 2009

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

Thank you this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament.

I would like to say a special word to the Foreign Ministers who have graced us with their presence here today.

Excellency Mr. Mourad Medelci, Foreign Minister of Algeria,
Excellency Madame Calmy-Rey, Foreign Minister of Switzerland,

Thank your for your leadership and personal engagement in advancing the work of the CD.

I am heartened that this meeting takes place in an improved international climate. Most recently, the Third Preparatory Committee of the 2010 NPT Review Conference concluded its session in a refreshingly positive tone, marking a distinct shift from previous years.

I am also encouraged by recent announcements by U.S. President Obama and Russian President Medvedev to begin talks to replace a Cold War-era nuclear arms control treaty and to work to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world. Let me extend my best wishes for the negotiations between the two countries taking place in Moscow.

There are now a number of initiatives from nuclear and non-nuclear States that together provide a new momentum for disarmament. They point the way to move from the divisions and paralysis of the past towards genuine dialogue and progress.

These signs of greater political will represent an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.

As I speak to audiences around the world and talk with world leaders, one theme constantly recurs.

We live in an age of interdependence. The past year of unfolding crises – food, energy, and now economic – have made this clear to all.

The answers to such crises, and other important issues such as climate change -- which I expect world leaders to emphatically address in December -- lie in a new multilateralism.

A new multilateralism where cooperation replaces confrontation, where creativity replaces stalemate.

Such a fresh multilateral approach is needed in disarmament and non-proliferation more than ever.

Last year, I presented my five-point proposal to revitalize the disarmament agenda.

I am encouraged that my proposal has been widely recognized. I welcome the many recent developments, statements and initiatives that can help to translate my proposals into real progress.

However, let me stress that the bilateral efforts we are witnessing must feed into a broader multilateral framework. This is the only way to make the process sustainable and lasting.

The world looks to you, the Conference on Disarmament, to channel these positive signals into a coherent global strategy.

You are the world's single multilateral negotiating body on disarmament. You represent a global partnership that can weave these disparate threads into comprehensive political agreements.

Still differences run deep. But, they are not insurmountable. Nor are they an excuse for paralysis.

The history of the Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors proves this beyond any doubt. Even at the height of the Cold War, landmark agreements, in particular the NPT, were concluded.

Subsequently, this Conference produced the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

We should be inspired by these past achievements.

Strategic stability, trust among nations and the settlement of regional conflicts will, of course, determine the pace and extent of possible progress.

Nonetheless, you have an opportunity to build on advances already made, leave behind entrenched positions and look instead to shared aims of peace and development.

At the recent NPT Prep Com, I called upon Member States to embrace the spirit of compromise and flexibility, rather than taking an absolute position. This spirit is equally needed in the Conference on Disarmament.

You have to bear special responsibility this year to demonstrate that the Conference on Disarmament has an essential role to play as the main pillar of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Business as usual should not prevail. Now is the time to break more than ten years of stalemate.

You have before you a document that can achieve consensus and that addresses all substantive and procedural issues.

I am grateful to the current President, Ambassador Jazairy, to the other 2009 Presidents and to all Members of the Conference for their enhanced engagement and flexibility that has led to this point.

One important feature of this proposal is that it supplements the mandate for negotiation of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty with provisions for "international and effective verification". This is an important step forward.

So is the creation of Working Groups to discuss effective negative security assurances, progressive and systematic efforts to reduce nuclear weapons and all issues related to the prevention of an arms race in space.

I would also like to emphasize that this Conference can add significantly to achieving the ultimate goal of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

However, this can only be realized if all States, nuclear and non-nuclear alike, are prepared to abide by their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments and nurture an international climate conducive to disarmament.

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is therefore of crucial importance.

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

A renewed focus on disarmament and non-proliferation will benefit international security and stability. It can also produce considerable dividends for peace and development.

The world is enduring a deep economic and financial crisis. By accelerating disarmament, we can liberate resources that we need to combat climate change, address food insecurity and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Let us unite behind a shared vision of a safer world. Let us find the courage for bold action to make it a reality.

Please accept my best wishes for success for the remainder of the 2009 session. Thank you.