

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### **“Weapons of Mass Destruction: Non-Proliferation and Disarmament”**

by Jayantha Dhanapala – Geneva. 4 February 2016

The International Peace Institute, since its inception as the International Peace Academy in 1970, has focused on strengthening the multilateral process in the conduct of international affairs with the United Nations as its focal point. I have been happy to be associated with its activities at various times during my own career. It is appropriate that in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of our indispensable global institution, the Independent Commission on Multilateralism should be established by the IPI to address 16 topics of relevance to the global agenda. It is a necessary corollary to the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals that the international community has agreed to pursue. I welcome especially the Commission’s choice of “Weapons of Mass Destruction, Nonproliferation and Disarmament” as one of them and appreciate the invitation to address this topic.

Seventy years ago on January 24, 1946, the United Nations General Assembly meeting in London adopted its very first resolution and, significantly, by consensus. This historic resolution established a commission of the UN Security Council to ensure:

- ❖ The “control of atomic energy to ensure its use only for peaceful purposes,” and
- ❖ “The elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.”

It was no surprise that less than one year after the end of World War II—following the horrifying first uses of atomic weapons on Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9, 1945—the UNGA should identify the elimination of nuclear weapons as the subject for its first resolution. No other weapon before or after has had such catastrophic humanitarian consequences, which include long-term genetic and ecological impacts. It was the very first international call for abolition - and it remains unfulfilled. Non-proliferation and disarmament are two faces of the same coin. There can be no proliferation if weapons are eliminated. We have banned the other two categories of weapons of mass destruction—biological weapons were outlawed by the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) of 1972 and has 173 parties to it today; and chemical weapons were delegitimized by the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which has 192 parties. While both treaty regimes lack universal membership, the BWC lacks a rigorous verification system or an organization, apart from an International Support Unit, to implement the convention. The CWC, on the other hand, has a most intrusive verification system and is supported by a robust organization that has proven itself over the issue of chemical weapons in Syria.

The world has approximately 15,850 nuclear warheads among nine nuclear weapon armed countries with USA and the Russian Federation accounting for 93% of the weapons. Of this about 4000 warheads are on a deployed operational footing. The spectre of the use of a nuclear weapon through political intent, cyber attack or by accident— by a nation state or by a non-state actor—is more real than we, in our cocoons of complacency, choose to acknowledge. At a time of declining resources for

development a huge amount of US \$ 1776 billion continues to be spent on arms in general and nuclear weapons modernization. In the US alone, in a glaring contradiction of President Obama's promises of a nuclear-weapon-free world, nuclear weapon modernization will cost \$ 355 billion over the next ten years. A far-sighted military general twice-elected President of the USA, Dwight Eisenhower, warned over 50 years ago about the insidious influence of the "military industrial complex". That influence—driven by an insatiable desire for profit—has spread globally, stoking the flames of war even as the United Nations and other peacemakers try to find peaceful solutions in terms of the Charter.

The world order today remains dominated by the nation-state system that we trace back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the Thirty Years War in Europe. The new nations of the Global South emerging from the decolonization process—first in Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Asia and Africa—have embraced this system with enthusiasm, drawing on their historical and cultural traditions to assert strongly held national identities. Despite the strong trends of globalization, aided by the Information and Communications Revolution that have integrated the peoples of the world today, the forces of nationalism continue to prevail. While some nations yield aspects of their sovereignty to form regional groupings, others willingly cede areas of governance to international organizations in a pragmatic recognition that multilateral approaches have comparative advantages over other strategies. And yet even that is being challenged by xenophobic reactions to the mass migration of people displaced by the wars that policies of "regime change" have caused.

At the apex of the rule-based multilateral system is the United Nations, which after 70 years, is engaged in a continuous process of renewal and reform aimed at strengthening multilateralism. The debate over multilateralism is not however coterminous with the debate over the UN or the direction of its reform. It is basically about the options available to nation states in the conduct of their international relations—whether they want to go it alone unilaterally, act in groups plurilaterally, or be a part of a more universal approach multilaterally.

The discussion and negotiation of disarmament issues at the multilateral level was long dominated in the postwar years by the permanent members of the Security Council and the two Cold War alliance partners within NATO and the Warsaw Pact. This trend persisted until the Non-aligned Movement began to assert its influence. The Colombo Summit of the Non-aligned in 1976, for example, led to the convening of the First Special Session of the GA devoted to Disarmament (SSOD I) in 1978. The Final Document of that Conference remains the indisputable high watermark of multilateral agreement on disarmament. In particular the setting of priorities was clear. I quote —

“47. Nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization. It is essential to halt and reverse the nuclear arms race in all its aspects in order to avert the danger of war involving nuclear weapons. The ultimate goal in this context is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

48. In the task of achieving the goals of nuclear disarmament, all the nuclear weapon States, in particular those among them which possess the most important nuclear arsenals, bear a special responsibility.”

Apart from agenda setting, SSOD-I also created the machinery for the deliberation and negotiation of disarmament, which is still in operation although some parts, such as the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament (CD), are arguably dysfunctional. On 26 January this year UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a message to the CD was unambiguously blunt in saying – “During my tenure as Secretary-General, I have done my best to help reinvigorate this body and to advance multilateral disarmament negotiations. This included my Five-Point Plan of 2008 and the high-level meeting I convened in 2010. I will continue to spare no effort, but the ultimate burden rests on the members of this Conference to bridge the gaps and find an urgent solution to the chronic impasse. Without such concrete action, this Conference risks becoming completely marginalized.”

The First Committee of the UNGA and the Disarmament Commission were established as the discussion or deliberative organs for multilateral disarmament including WMD. The CD in Geneva was the sole multilateral negotiating body. In addition the Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) were created. UNIDIR, which I headed in the past, has a special responsibility to equip developing countries with the expertise to participate in disarmament negotiations. Almost four decades later there is considerable value in reviewing the effectiveness of these bodies and there is pressure to do so. Subsequent Special Sessions—SSOD-II and SSOD-III—failed to make the same impact and several efforts on the part of the Non-aligned Movement to convene SSOD-IV have also failed.

At the last session of the UNGA, however, a new development was launched with the Open-Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament, which commences this year in Geneva hopefully with full participation from nuclear weapon and non-nuclear weapon states. Meanwhile individual treaty-based groups have their own meetings regarding Nuclear Weapon free zones, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, and other treaties circumscribing the deployment and use of nuclear weapons to review the operation of those treaties. The fact that the last NPT Review Conference ended with no agreement on a consensus Final Document is evidence that these multilateral systems are not working well. Indeed a general paralysis seems to have set in with the multilateral process on WMD with the CD being the scene of the main obstruction. Such periods of inactivity in the multilateral process have occurred before, especially during the Cold War. It is by no means cast in stone that the CD should only work on the FMCT or that the Shannon Mandate should be followed to the letter when there are so many other agenda items also deserving of priority attention. In similar circumstances when no agreement was visible on a CTBT, an Ad hoc Group of Scientific Experts worked tirelessly on the verification of a CTBT. Thus, at a minimum, a Group of Scientific Experts can be appointed to the CD to undertake the important task of designing a verification system for a Nuclear Weapon Convention in anticipation of when the time is ripe for such a Convention. Work can also be conducted concurrently on all agenda items.

The challenge for the Independent Commission on Multilateralism is to identify the causes of this paralysis and propose ways and means out of the impasse. We have a success story from the recent past to build upon. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the “Five plus One” States resolved key issues on Iran’s nuclear programme and that Plan is now being implemented. It was concluded after long and painstaking diplomatic negotiations, which prove that constructive co-operation can yield positive results.

However, it is a matter of enormous concern that the US and Russia are currently not talking to each other about their own nuclear arms control and a new round of START talks. We have not experienced this ominous silence between them on this topic for many years, even if they are to be commended for keeping to the terms of the existing START Treaty despite the deterioration of their relationship.

Ironically, while this year began with the fourth nuclear test of the DPRK, we will see the 20th anniversary of the signing of the CTBT, which must enter into force sooner than later. China, the US, Israel, Iran and Egypt have all signed but not ratified while DPRK, India and Pakistan have not signed. It is time for some hard diplomatic work on this front both bilaterally and multilaterally.

It is assumed that the failure of the multilateral system to yield results is because of the absence of political will. Indeed no reform of the machinery will help unless the negotiating parties have a positive desire to compromise engaging in a dialogue across divides. Multilateralism as an ideology would be ineffective unless its benefits in practical application are demonstrable. This is perhaps why the term “effective multilateralism” has gained currency. For multilateralism to be effective, there must be certain pre-requisites such as the combined political will of nations to act together, institutions to implement action and resources. There must also be the perception that the benefits of multilateral action must be equitable in the benefits it brings to the international community and thus we can have what might be called, “equilateral multilateralism”. Availability of resources must be predictable and cannot depend on subjective decisions on the part of participants in the process according to the progress being achieved.

We live in a rapidly changing complex world where several developments are inextricably interwoven. Ethno-religious extremism of barbaric proportions makes the threat of WMD being used either as a ‘dirty bomb’ or as a more sophisticated device a grim reality and no longer a nightmare. Here in Geneva, Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum has written about the Fourth Industrial Revolution saying – “The First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production. The Second used electric power to create mass production. The Third used electronics and information technology to automate production. Now a Fourth Industrial Revolution is building on the Third, the digital revolution that has been occurring since the middle of the last century. It is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.”

More pertinently for our discussions here, Schwab refers to the impact of this on international security. I quote –

*The Fourth Industrial Revolution will also profoundly impact the nature of*

*national and international security, affecting both the probability and the nature of conflict. The history of warfare and international security is the history of technological innovation, and today is no exception. Modern conflicts involving states are increasingly “hybrid” in nature, combining traditional battlefield techniques with elements previously associated with nonstate actors. The distinction between war and peace, combatant and noncombatant, and even violence and nonviolence (think cyberwarfare) is becoming uncomfortably blurry.*

*As this process takes place and new technologies such as autonomous or biological weapons become easier to use, individuals and small groups will increasingly join states in being capable of causing mass harm. This new vulnerability will lead to new fears. But at the same time, advances in technology will create the potential to reduce the scale or impact of violence, through the development of new modes of protection, for example, or greater precision in targeting.*

Schwab’s words help to explain my own personal involvement in the “Campaign to Stop Killer Robots”, a campaign co-ordinated by Human Rights Watch, to preemptively ban Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). We would like to see these banned before they are developed and are alarmed by the increasing number of states actively researching precursors to fully autonomous weapons. The risk of proliferation increases as they go unregulated. The application of these systems to weapons of mass destruction in the battlefield has frightening implications for the laws of war, especially proportionality and the important distinction between combatant and civilian, which a programmed robot with no human intervention will be able to discern.

Before I conclude let me refer to another issue raised by commentators on contemporary international affairs and that is the so-called “Thucydides Trap”. In an article in the “Atlantic” in September 2015, Professor Graham Allison of Harvard’s Belfer Centre wrote—

*The defining question about global order for this generation is whether China and the United States can escape Thucydides’s Trap. The Greek historian’s metaphor reminds us of the attendant dangers when a rising power rivals a ruling power—as Athens challenged Sparta in ancient Greece, or as Germany did Britain a century ago. Most such contests have ended badly, often for both nations, a team of mine at the Harvard Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs has concluded after analyzing the historical record. In 12 of 16 cases over the past 500 years, the result was war. When the parties avoided war, it required huge, painful adjustments in attitudes and actions on the part not just of the challenger but also the challenged.*

While international affairs experts and diplomats debate the issue, one fundamental aspect that stands out from the 16 cases referred to, is that nuclear weapons, with the single exception of the Cold War, were never a part of the equation. There is therefore no question of falling into the “Thucydides Trap” by design or accident when the two contending powers are armed with weapons of mass destruction. Solutions based on international law and negotiated through patient diplomacy, and not aggressive

containment policies or uncompromising irredentism, are surely the lesson of history to be adopted in this nuclear age.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen the task of the Independent Commission on Multilateralism is both challenging and timely. I wish you all success.