

**Remarks to the Opening of the 80th Session
of the First Committee of the General Assembly**

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As delivered



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Your Excellency Ambassador Maurizio Massari,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Allow me to start by warmly congratulating Ambassador Massari on his election, as well as the members of the Bureau. I wish you success for this session.

I also express deep appreciation to Ambassador Maritza Chan Valverde of Costa Rica for her exemplary and skillful leadership during the 79th session.

Her steadfast commitment to gender equality deserves particular recognition.

Women's full, equal, meaningful and effective participation in disarmament discussions is a key part of ensuring that their outcomes respond to the challenges of today – and the future.

Context/international security landscape

Distinguished delegates,

I am honored to address the 80th session of the First Committee.

This is the 9th time I have had this opportunity over the course of my tenure as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

Over those nine years, there have been inevitable peaks and valleys.

We have welcomed the adoption of new treaties, normative frameworks and consensus outcome documents.

Many of these successful initiatives have emanated from this very room.

At the same time, there is an increasing and urgent need to confront the sobering realities of our times.

The international security landscape has suffered - and continues to suffer - serious shocks from intensifying conflicts to rising nuclear rhetoric to the rapid emergence of new weapons technologies.

It is against this backdrop that I cannot help but offer a very candid analysis of the state-of-the-world.

I will be blunt—it is a difficult time for disarmament, international security, and the United Nations.

In 2024, global military expenditure reached a staggering 2.7 trillion USD.

We continue to witness nuclear posturing, qualitative nuclear arms racing, and quantitative arsenal expansion.

Advances in technology - particularly artificial intelligence - are far outpacing governance efforts, raising legal, security, and ethical concerns.

In conflicts across regions, the devastating human cost of weapons is glaring—from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to illicit flows of small arms and light weapons.

At a time when civilians are facing heightened risks, the very frameworks in place to protect human life and dignity, such as the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and Convention on Cluster Munitions, are under serious pressure.

UN80

As we face challenges on all these fronts, we must consider the capacity of the United Nations itself to respond to them.

On its 80th anniversary, the United Nations' relevance, effectiveness and legitimacy are especially under the spotlight.

These challenges are compounded by a financial and liquidity crisis that are straining the Organization's capacities to its limits.

The United Nations has been forced to scale back operations at a time when they are needed the most.

In response, the Secretary-General has launched the UN80 Initiative.

The goal is to transform the UN into a more agile, integrated, and effective Organization equipped to respond to today's global challenges, while also responding to budgetary pressures.

The initiative seeks to streamline mandates and operations, find efficiencies and prevent duplication.

The Secretary-General has been clear that the United Nations remains the essential, one-of-a-kind platform to advance peace, sustainable development, humanitarian action, and human rights – a sentiment supported by a vast majority of Member States.

To maintain its central role in multilateralism, we must ensure the Organization is fit-for-purpose.

UN80 is a way to bring the UN up to speed.

Across the Secretariat, alongside the revised budgetary process which will help us align with the current financial climate, we are undertaking broad mitigation measures to respond to the availability of significantly fewer resources.

Our work in disarmament is not immune to this tightening.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has had to make very difficult decisions for more efficient utilization of fewer financial and human resources.

And we will continue to strive to align our shrinking capacities with the growing needs for disarmament.

But let me be clear—the Secretariat will not be able to deliver “the same for less.”

This is simply not possible.

I ask Member States to carefully review any new mandate in light of available resources and capacities.

While budgetary matters fall outside the purview of the First Committee, we should all be clear-eyed regarding potential substantive impacts resulting from the dual crises of liquidity and budget.

Enduring value of disarmament

Distinguished delegates,

Allow me now to strike a more positive tone.

Neither the United Nations as a whole, nor the Office for Disarmament Affairs specifically, will shy away from the challenges of the moment.

Quite the opposite.

Current institutional challenges and international security trends should rather spark renewed commitment to the enduring value of disarmament.

Disarmament has always been central to the UN's foundation.

From the General Assembly's very first resolution calling for the elimination of atomic weapons to the latest initiatives tackling the international security implications of new technologies, disarmament has been a constant in these halls.

My Office remains your steadfast partner in ensuring this work continues—from managing bio risks, to preventing an arms race in outer space, to combatting the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Key challenges in disarmament and how to address them

Distinguished delegates,

I will now highlight a few key substantive issues, with particular emphasis on opportunities I see for tackling them.

In the interest of time, I will refrain from providing an exhaustive overview of all issues under the purview of the Committee, but, rest assured, my Office will remain fully seized of the Committee's agenda.

First, regarding nuclear weapons.

In August, I visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki to mark 80 years since the devastation of the atomic bombings.

While the vast majority of the world continues to actively pursue the total elimination of nuclear weapons, we must do more and do it urgently.

We must lower the political temperature if we are to prevent nuclear war, or any use of nuclear weapons.

Measures to reduce risk are not substitutes for disarmament, but necessary to ensure that we, collectively, are around long enough to achieve it.

Next, we must ensure that arms control frameworks are protected.

Pending the negotiation of a successor, at a minimum, the central limits on New START must be maintained.

And finally, we must strengthen the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime grounded in the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

It goes without saying, a successful outcome at the 2026 NPT Review Conference is essential.

Establishing a Middle East zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction will contribute meaningfully to realizing a world free of nuclear weapons and to promoting peace and security in the Middle East and beyond.

Maintaining momentum through the dedicated conference process remains critical.

Second, on rising global military expenditure.

Just a few weeks ago, the Secretary-General launched a new report “*The Security We Need: Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future*,” mandated by your Pact for the Future.

As the Secretary-General notes, while global military spending soars, progress on the Sustainable Development Goals is faltering—with only one in five targets on track for 2030.

This troubling imbalance invites us to fundamentally rethink the relationship between security, disarmament and development.

We must look holistically at the peace and development agendas and recalibrate global financial priorities.

Investment in disarmament and arms control is a direct investment in long-term peace and security, and, therefore, sustainable development.

I was heartened to hear so many Heads of State and Government raise concerns on rising military expenditure during the General Debate of the General Assembly.

This is indicative of the high-level, growing awareness and concern over arms racing and associated opportunity costs for achieving the SDGs.

I also welcome achievements made in the framework of the Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, in particular the consensus outcome of the Fourth Review Conference.

At the regional level, new roadmaps and normative initiatives are helping to address the transnational nature of illicit small arms.

Such developments support a solid pathway forward that anchors regional approaches to international frameworks.

Let us seize this momentum and continue to bring military expenditure to the forefront of disarmament discussions and improve linkages between arms control and development.

Third, let me say a few words on emerging technologies.

Here, the distinct sense of urgency is unmistakable.

The cutting-edge technologies of today are obsolete tomorrow.

And when applied in the military domain, technological challenges are even more acute.

Rapidly advancing technologies have the potential to revolutionize conflict dynamics in the not-too-distant future.

In fact, some already are doing so.

Information and communications technologies are being used in direct connection to active hostilities.

Recent conflicts have become alarming testing grounds for AI applications.

And current conflicts have been a significant catalyst for accelerating the development and proliferation of armed uncrewed aerial vehicles, UAVs, from greater integration of autonomy to dramatically lower costs.

Frameworks tackling dual-use technologies, like ICTs and AI, often fall short in effectively managing their rapid proliferation and potential misuse across civilian and military domains.

That said, we have seen concrete movement forward at the UN in some of these areas, demonstrating that even amidst deepening geopolitical divides and growing mistrust, progress on critical and urgent issues *is still possible*.

The consensus establishment of a new permanent, Global Mechanism on ICT security, set to begin its work in 2026, is a case-in-point.

I also welcome the progress made this year in advancing discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems both within the General Assembly and, in particular, within the Group of Governmental Experts of the CCW, which I hope will produce ambitious elements on concrete regulations.

Fundamentally, we must ensure that human judgment and control is preserved in the use of force.

As the Secretary-General regularly underscores, technologies must serve humanity, not the other way around.

Conclusion/Youth Forum

Distinguished delegates,

As we find ourselves in an exceptionally difficult moment, we need new ideas, renewed energy and a dose of creativity.

This is why I have always stressed the importance of engaging young people in disarmament conversations.

Exactly one year ago, when I addressed this Committee, I suggested the creation of a Disarmament Youth Forum.

Today, I am very pleased to announce that this idea has come to fruition.

My Office, with the generous support of the Republic of Korea, will host the first-ever UN Youth4Disarmament Forum here at UN Headquarters from 16 to 17 October.

The Forum has been developed with young people, for young people, placing meaningful youth participation at the heart of its design.

I invite all delegations to follow the Forum in the spirit of working “better together,” as mentioned by the President of the General Assembly, to advance our shared goals of international peace and security.

The challenges we face are solvable, and the moment to act is now.

Rest assured my Office is here to support all delegations to this end.

I thank you very much for your attention.