United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

25th ROK - UN Joint Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues

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Opening Remarks
As delivered

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Your Excellency, Mr. JEONG Yeondoo, Vice Minister for Strategy and Intelligence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea,

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure to join you here in Seoul for the twenty-fifth ROK–UN Joint Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Issues.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for the warm hospitality and enduring partnership with my office, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

For twenty-five years, this partnership has sustained a valuable platform for dialogue: bringing together government representatives, experts and civil society to examine security challenges, exchange perspectives and explore possibilities for cooperation.

The continuity of this engagement really matters. Building trust requires sustained effort. So does maintaining the connections between communities, institutions and generations on which effective multilateral diplomacy depends.

As we mark this milestone, I thank the many colleagues and partners whose contributions have helped this conference grow. I also welcome the young participants who will help shape its future as well, and of course I would like to thank the Government of Korea for the broader partnership we have. Your leadership with the Government of the Netherlands on broad military use of AI, and your support on the Youth 4 Disarmament has been profoundly impactful, and I thank you for your support.

Excellencies,

This anniversary invites us to reflect on how profoundly the international security landscape has changed—and on how our cooperation must evolve.

I have been struck by recent reports that malicious actors have attempted to use AI models to support multiple stages of cyber operations, as well as conventional weapons development and biological and chemical weapons-related research.

While these models were developed for general-purpose applications, their capabilities have clear implications for international security.

From my perspective, this underscores the importance of our discussions on convergence. We need to understand not only the risks associated with specific technologies and domains, but also how advances in one area can enable or amplify harmful activities in another.

Developments in science and technology have long-shaped disarmament. Scientific discovery gives us better tools to verify commitments and support transparency and confidence-building, but they can also transform military capabilities, challenge existing agreements and create new risks.

Today, the unprecedented speed, accessibility and convergence of technological advances are making it difficult for governance to keep up – this is true at the national, regional and international levels.

Artificial intelligence is a particularly consequential example where impacts are felt in every aspect of daily life. Its applications extend across military functions and across the weapons categories around which much of our disarmament architecture is organized.

Our task is to understand what this means for international peace and security so that we can harness advantages and forestall and mitigate risks before they materialize.

We undertake this task in a deeply challenging environment. Mistrust is growing. Armed conflicts are causing immense civilian casualties and suffering. Disarmament commitments, international law and humanitarian norms face increasing pressure.

Too often, battlefields have become testing grounds for advancing technologies.

Distinguished participants,

The programme before us recognizes that AI's implications cannot be understood in isolation.

In the nuclear domain, AI could assist monitoring and verification. Yet, its use also has the potential to complicate these activities, by creating new challenges related to transparency, reliability, attribution and trust in the verification process. It may also affect nuclear command, control and communications, including by introducing new pathways for escalation and misperception. And while AI may offer benefits in areas such as early warning and decision support, it could also amplify unreliable information, encourage excessive confidence in machine-generated assessments and compress the time available for human control and judgement.

In chemistry and biology, AI can accelerate scientific discovery, improve detection and strengthen protective responses. But some of the same capabilities could facilitate harmful activities and lower barriers to misuse.

We must safeguard peaceful scientific cooperation while ensuring that advances in technology do not undermine the norms against weapons of mass destruction.

In cyberspace, AI can strengthen defence and resilience which also enables and amplifies malicious activity. AI systems themselves can be manipulated or compromised, with consequences for the infrastructure that relies on them.

And in conventional military operations, AI-enabled targeting, decision support and autonomous functions raise fundamental questions about human control, and judgement and accountability.

These developments require us to look carefully at the connections and convergences between technologies and military functions. A vulnerability in one system could have consequences far beyond its original purpose. The interaction between two or more technologies could have unforeseeable effects.

So this conference offers an opportunity to examine those connections while respecting the distinct mandates and obligations of existing disarmament frameworks.

Excellencies,

Let me suggest three priorities for your discussions.

First, anchor policy decisions in technical understanding.

Diplomats need access to credible expertise about what AI systems can do, where their limitations lie and how they may fail. Scientists, academics and industry need to understand the legal obligations, security concerns and humanitarian consequences that must guide their work.

These exchanges should inform decisions throughout a system's life cycle—from pre-design to development, use and decommissioning as well.

Second, strengthen coherence in governance.

We should identify where existing frameworks can address AI-related risks and where gaps require further attention. We must consider how national, regional and international approaches can align and reinforce one another, and which forums are best suited to take particular issues forward. This includes distinguishing questions that require responses within specific disarmament

regimes from those that would benefit from coordination across them, while respecting their distinct mandates.

And third, ensure meaningful and inclusive participation.

All States have a stake in the implications of military AI. Differences in technical capacity must not become barriers to shaping international approaches.

Asia and the Pacific brings scientific expertise, technological innovation and diverse security perspectives to this work. Connecting these perspectives to global deliberations is an essential contribution of this conference and of our Regional Centre, UNRCPD.

I particularly welcome the dedicated discussion on next-generation perspectives. Young people must have opportunities to contribute substantively to the policies that will shape their security.

Distinguished participants,

Twenty-five years of partnership provide a strong foundation for the work ahead.

Let us use this anniversary to renew our commitment to dialogue, international law and practical cooperation—and to ensure that scientific and technological progress supports human progress.

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to support these efforts.

I thank the Republic of Korea once again for the strong partnership and wish you productive discussions.

Thank you very much for your attention.