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High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

***“Securing our Common Future:
Why disarmament matters today as much as ever”***

University of Ottawa, Wednesday, 19 February 2020

Dr. Alexandra Gheciu,

Dr. Jennifer Simons,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the gracious introduction and what a pleasure it is to join you today. My sincere thanks to the University of Ottawa’s Centre for International Policy Studies for inviting me to deliver this lecture. My deep appreciation also to *Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention*, and to Ernie Regehr and Senator Douglas Roche in particular, for making this event happen.

This august institution has produced many inspiring Canadians, including my esteemed former colleague and close friend, Louise Arbour.

It is also a pleasure to be back in Canada. Since the inception of the United Nations, Canada has been a champion of multilateralism and of disarmament.

From seeking to ban landmines and nuclear testing, to holding accountable those who dare to use chemical weapons and advocating for a long overdue ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, few can lay claim to having had as great an

impact on the elimination of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the regulation of conventional weapons as Canada.

I would especially like to applaud Canada for its leadership on an issue of the utmost importance to me – the advancement of women’s empowerment and promotion of the rights of women and girls, something Canada’s feminist foreign policy does much to progress.

This leadership extends also to the field of disarmament. Canada remains among the strongest and most consistent voices in support of both the achievement of gender parity in disarmament processes, as well as the systematic recognition of the gendered impact of different weapons and the solutions required to respond to these realities in a sustainable manner.

I should highlight too the leadership role Canadian scientists, diplomats and civil society have played, and continue to play, in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

As the title of my lecture indicates, the need for that quality of leadership has not diminished.

I want to begin today by saying that an important element of my role as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs is public outreach, often through speeches or lectures such as this. I speak to many different groups and stakeholders, but I particularly relish speaking at academic institutions such as this one and having the chance to engage with thought leaders – of both this generation and future generations. I do hope we will have a robust question and answer session.

While the concept of ‘youth’ is somewhat amorphous, by some metrics we are witnessing the largest generation in history: 1.8 billion “young” people, 90 percent of whom reside in developing countries. Working with and for young people is, therefore, central to ensuring a more peaceful and prosperous world for all.

This is a responsibility I take seriously because the world around us is one that is increasingly marked by division, distrust and a dearth of dialogue.

Relations between countries, including those possessing nuclear weapons, are declining as diplomacy gives way to bellicose rhetoric and the militarization of international affairs.

As Secretary-General Guterres said to the General Assembly: “Across the global landscape, we see conflicts persisting, terrorism spreading and the risk of a new arms race growing.”

It is an environment in which the use of nuclear weapons – either deliberately, by accident or through miscalculation – is higher than it has been in decades.

This is what I would like to speak about today – the grave dangers posed by nuclear weapons and the pressing need for diplomatic measures to confront those dangers.

Given the complexity of today’s international context, with its raft of priorities – from climate change to sustainable development, pandemics and migration – it is useful to consider why nuclear weapons should be among the most urgent.

I can name three reasons.

First, after seventy-five years, nuclear weapons remain the most destructive weapons invented. Most of the weapons in today’s arsenals are vastly more powerful than those that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Second, along with climate change, nuclear weapons pose one of two existential threats to the planet – nuclear war threatens the prospect of an environmental cataclysm.

And third, any use of nuclear weapons would precipitate a humanitarian catastrophe. No country can adequately respond to the use of a nuclear weapon, especially one detonated in a populated area.

For these reasons, the Secretary-General has repeatedly underscored that the pursuit of nuclear disarmament is the United Nations' highest disarmament priority.

And for these reasons, the international community has worked to prevent the use of nuclear weapons and to take steps towards their elimination.

Total numbers of nuclear weapons are a fraction of what they were in the mid-1980s, and a sound framework of instruments has been developed to reduce the risks of nuclear war and advance nuclear disarmament.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or the NPT, has emerged as the lynchpin of this regime – a bulwark against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and a de facto negotiating forum to achieve gains in nuclear disarmament.

Such progress was possible largely due to political leadership from nuclear weapons possessors, especially the United States and the Russian Federation, but also global efforts to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons; to build transparency, trust and confidence; and to advance an understanding that the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons enhances all countries' security.

Sadly, in recent years this progress has first slowed, then stalled, and now appears to be in retreat.

What the Secretary-General has termed “the nuclear menace” is growing. The norm against the use of nuclear weapons and the collective goal of a nuclear weapon-free world are threatened in ways not seen since the height of the Cold War.

Contrary to the perceptions of many, the threat of nuclear weapons never left us. Even today there are still some fourteen thousand nuclear weapons in existing arsenals. What has changed – what has provoked a sense of alarm among many – is the result of several intersecting developments.

The first is what I would call a return to Cold War-style mindsets about the utility of nuclear weapons. Rhetoric about nuclear warfighting is increasingly common and is coupled with expensive nuclear weapon modernization campaigns – campaigns that go beyond maintaining the security and safety of nuclear weapons to the development of new military missions.

Many have argued that we have moved from a quantitative nuclear arms race based on numbers to a qualitative nuclear arms race based on faster, stealthier and more accurate weapons.

The second development relates to the way in which the nuclear landscape and, indeed, the global security landscape, has shifted. The nuclear bipolarity of the Cold War is gone, but it is not yet clear what has replaced it. Regional tensions with nuclear overtones, such as recently in South Asia, are not declining. Regional proliferation concerns including in the Middle East and East Asia, are worsening.

In parallel, transformative technologies in areas such as computing power, machine learning and sensors are driving the development of new means and methods of warfare. If left unchecked, these could have dangerous ramifications, including for the use of nuclear weapons. Conflict in cyberspace or outer space could have strategic consequences. The development of artificial intelligence poses serious questions about human control of decisions over the use of force. Our increasingly digitally linked world has exposed new vulnerabilities, such as the possible hacking or spoofing of command and control structures.

A third development, closely linked to the others, is the decline of the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation regime. The institutions created to safeguard our collective security and to negotiate the next steps in arms control and disarmament are paralyzed. Arms control agreements painstakingly constructed throughout the Cold War are collapsing.

The dissolution of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty last year was a serious blow not only to regional but global security.

The removal of these brakes on nuclear weapons competition, without a successor in place, serves to exacerbate the concerns I have already outlined. The inability of the international community to negotiate new instruments undermines faith in multilateral institutions as a means of constraining armed conflict.

In 2017, one hundred and twenty-two countries adopted the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty in more than twenty years. But while the treaty clearly reflects the legitimate fears of a majority of the international community, no nuclear-armed country or any of their allies have joined it.

Dear colleagues,

These are negative trends, but they are not irreversible. I would, therefore, like to focus on how we can respond to these challenges and craft a way forward to a safer and more secure world.

Almost two years ago, Secretary-General Guterres released his agenda for disarmament, *Securing Our Common Future*. He did so not to prescribe a course of action for UN Member States, but rather to provide a road map of potential solutions to the numerous challenges to international peace and security we face.

The agenda is holistic – it recognizes that, while nuclear weapons pose an existential threat, it is the so-called conventional weapons that are the main killers. These weapons, including their illicit circulation among state and non-state actors, are chiefly responsible for the human suffering caused to men, boys, women and girls caught up in cycles of conflict and armed violence. One need only to look at the news to see the devastating impact. The agenda highlights the need for new partnerships and to seek new ways to ensure new technologies are not used to threaten humanity. It also ensures

a diversity of voices are brought into discussions, including civil society, women and youth.

More broadly, the agenda seeks to reinsert disarmament into its historic position as an integral component of conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution.

The four pillars of the agenda – the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, the regulation of conventional weapons, the response to new means and methods of warfare and the need for strengthened partnerships – represent a guiding framework for my office, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, and for the United Nations system more broadly.

Not everyone has agreed with every part of the agenda, but I have been heartened by the number of countries that have signed up as champions and supporters of key actions, including Canada.

When it comes to nuclear disarmament, there are a number of steps that Member States can take to get back on the path to a world free of nuclear weapons. And on which academic institutions and civil society organizations, including young people, can serve as key advocates and catalysts for action.

The first is to hold the line and stop the erosion of the existing regime. I applaud all efforts to seek new frameworks for a dynamic international context, but we should not abandon time-tested instruments until those new frameworks are in place.

In this context, the extension of the “New START” treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States must be of the highest priority. Should this treaty expire in 2021 without a successor, it will be the first time we have faced unconstrained nuclear competition since the 1970s.

The Secretary-General has been active in encouraging both countries to extend the treaty, as provided for in its articles, and so should the rest of the world.

A second near-term action and one necessary to reinforce the norm against the use of nuclear weapons, is for all countries to reaffirm the Reagan-Gorbachev statement that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.

Third, while I firmly believe that the only way to eliminate the risks posed by nuclear weapons is to eliminate the weapons themselves, there is a clear need for practical measures that can reduce the current risks associated with them.

One place to start could be to restore many of the confidence-building measures utilized during the Cold War, such as working level military-to-military dialogues. Another could be the development of regional risk reduction measures or those to reduce the risks associated with new technologies.

A fourth action is to finish the unfinished business of the last two decades. Both an in-force legally binding prohibition on nuclear testing and a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons are essential elements of a world free of nuclear weapons. They should remain priorities. Canada has invested in leading these processes.

Similarly, in 1995, 2000 and 2010, members of the NPT undertook numerous commitments related to disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Many of these commitments remain unfulfilled. While I appreciate that the changing international context has affected some, the vast majority remain relevant – not least the unequivocal undertaking by the five nuclear-weapon States to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Commitments undertaken in the framework of the NPT need to be honoured. Failure to do so fundamentally weakens the Treaty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The five actions I've outlined are necessary near-term initiatives. But as I have noted, the international environment has evolved considerably since the end of the Cold War.

The current context requires, in the words of Secretary-General Guterres, “a new vision”.

We must recognize that there are new risks and new opportunities. We need to clearly identify and find solutions for the former, as well as ways to leverage the latter.

Such a new vision requires much more thought and debate before it can have any practical effect. However, there are some clear gaps that need to be addressed. Let me mention several as examples.

Any new vision, first and foremost, needs to take into account the multipolar nuclear order. Efforts to reduce and eliminate not only nuclear weapons themselves, but also their delivery vehicles, need to become more multilateral.

The outstanding issue of missiles needs to be addressed. For too long the dangers posed by missiles and their proliferation has been unconstrained. As these weapons become more advanced and more countries acquire them, it is time to consider how to ensure they do not become an increasingly destabilizing factor in international relations.

The international community should seek solutions to mitigate the challenges today’s game-changing technologies will pose to strategic stability and to the existing non-proliferation safeguards regime. But, perhaps more importantly, it should also consider how we can make better use of these technologies in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Disarmament verification is one area in which new technologies are already being applied, but there are others such as nuclear security measures and safeguards that also have great potential. This underscores that there are many positives that can be associated with the use of new technologies.

The divisive issue of missile defence systems also needs to be discussed. Many of the perceived concerns related to the future of arms control stem from this issue.

Finally, a new vision must make room for new voices. This does not just mean bringing new voices to the table, but to quote a fellow Canadian and disarmament leader, Ray Acheson, of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Reaching Critical Will, it's about "completely re-setting the table."

For too long the need for gender-balance in disarmament and the inclusion of a gender dimension in disarmament policy has been overlooked. This needs to change. I welcome States', including Canada's, support on this matter, but more needs to be done.

A new approach to disarmament should recognize and address the gendered impact of different weapon types and systems and the impact certain weapons have on the prevalence of gender-based violence. It should underscore that ensuring the equal, full and effective participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament is essential for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security.

There is historic precedence for women's engagement in shaping disarmament instruments, from the making of the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963, to the Anti-Personnel Landmine Treaty of 1999, to the Treaty of Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons of 2017. We must build on these experiences to ensure that the field of disarmament of the future includes the diverse perspectives and experiences needed to unlock creative, innovative and sustainable solutions.

For this reason, my office has initiated a youth for disarmament movement to connect young people with experts to learn about today's international security challenges, the work of the UN and how they can be active participants. We have also established a Youth Champions for Disarmament training programme to impart the necessary knowledge and skills to young people and empower them to make their contribution to disarmament and sustaining peace, as national and world citizens. I trust institutions such as this one will also serve as incubators of new experts and leaders in this field.

In April and May of this year, the States parties to the NPT will hold their five-yearly review of the Treaty. This Conference, which also celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty's entry into force and the twenty-fifth anniversary of its indefinite extension, presents both a symbolic and a practical opportunity to take action on all of the issues I have raised today.

I believe the Review Conference can be a springboard for the coming years – a way to chart a future course of action and ensure that this vital treaty retains its place as the centrepiece of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and as a pillar of our collective security. But it is up to States parties to acknowledge that responsibility and act upon it in a spirit of cooperation and flexibility. Again, I trust that Canada will take a leading role in this respect.

With that, I want to thank you for listening to me today, and I hope that we will have the opportunity to work together to craft the world we want for this and future generations.