Disarmament and Human Security

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Today is the sixty-third anniversary of the signing of U.N. Charter, an anniversary so important to humanity. My presentation will focus on the connection between human security and disarmament and the challenges that this poses for the United Nations.

As far back as 1862, Henri Dunant[i], the founder of modern-day humanitarianism and one of this country's greatest sons, said "*If the new and frightful weapons of destruction which are now at the disposal of the nations, seem destined to abridge the duration of future wars, it appears likely … that future battle will become more and more murderous*". And thus we see the that link between weapons control and humanitarian action was obvious from the beginnings of international humanitarian law.

Disarmament is, at heart, a humanitarian issue. It is precisely because of the effects of these terrible weapons on people that we are interested in disarmament. Ordinary people, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters and sons whose limbs are ripped apart, who slowly bleed to death, whose livelihoods are lost and who starve as a result of the use of weapons. These are the people for whom we are working to rid the world of the weapons that would otherwise destroy them. Disarmament is rooted in the already existing norms that have been established by international humanitarian law. They share their DNA. When progress in disarmament has been achieved, it is because the devastating impact of the weapons involved has been understood.

To give a couple of examples, of which there are many:

1) It was the horror and disgust at the use of such indiscriminate and inhumane weapons as asphyxiating gases and the use of bacteriological methods of warfare - along with the increasing awareness that they afforded little, if any, military advantage on the battlefield - that prompted governments to eventually outlaw them completely. This connection between humanitarian law and disarmament led to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention.

2) It was the realization of the impact on peoples' health and devastating environmental effects of testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere and the growing fears of where the nuclear arms race would end up that created the conditions for the 1963 Partial Test Ban. This Treaty that prohibited nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere, underwater or in outer space, was followed by bilateral and unilateral restraints on nuclear weapons testing - leading eventually to the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons tests in 1996.

Similarly, a body of International Humanitarian Law and Disarmament Treaty Law has been built up to control and prohibit a range of conventional weapons. This approach has lead to regulations and prohibitions on a variety of conventional weapons, including the Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions. And the UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is leading to useful national, regional and international action to reduce and prevent armed violence. The first steps towards a global Arms Trade Treaty are now institutionalized in the UN and we are looking forward to seeing the connection between human rights, human security, humanitarianism and disarmament take shape within that treaty.

Indeed the only successes in the disarmament agenda in recent years have been those shaped by the humanitarian imperative, the concern for

peoples' health and for the damage wrought on the environment and on the moral fabric of societies. In other aspects of disarmament, such as nuclear disarmament, the agenda is still being driven and constrained by the politics of large powers and their allies. As a result, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) has not begun negotiations since a three-week stint in 1998 and its last success was in 1996.

On the CD agenda there is much that would make a difference: nuclear disarmament, a fission weapons material production ban and preventing weapons in space would be significant contributions to human security **- if** the conference could ever get beyond agreeing its agenda and starting work. Indeed the multilateral agenda for disarmament was set at the first General Assembly Special Session on Disarmament - exactly thirty years ago this coming 1st July – and it has not been updated since.

On the bilateral and regional side, things are not getting better. Existing Treaties are under threat –the 1990 Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty is no longer in operation and the Adapted CFE Treaty is in a state of limbo. The INF Treaty is under threat, although in the hope of reinvigoration it has been opened up for all to sign. In most need of attention, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, with all of its verification and confidence-building measures comes to an end in 2009 with nothing yet to replace it – although talks are underway.

We are, it seems, at a tipping point, a phase transition. One more move in the wrong direction and great opportunities would be lost. A few judicious moves in the right direction, however could tip us into a new paradigm of human security and humanitarian action as the centre of disarmament and arms control efforts.

We need new, creative approaches. We could need a radical reform of multilateral disarmament practices but we cannot wait passively for that reform to take place. To reform the agenda we need agents of change.

Human Security in the UN has been interpreted as “Putting People First” is a catch-cry from the humanitarian community and it serves us well in disarmament also. Disarmament is a tool that we can use to increase human security.

For example, the removal of antipersonnel landmines - and other types of ordnance lying in the paths of every day life - increases human security for all. The destruction of stockpiles and the prohibition of the weapons help keep it that way.

Since the negotiation of the 1997 Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) in Dublin just last month, we

have a new humanitarian approach that tackles the hazards of the lethal, indiscriminate and inhumane weapons to civilians. Both the MBC and the CCM developed a critical mass of commitment in a remarkably short periods of time, and are excellent examples of how focusing on a high standard, even though that means not every country can sign up immediately, can have an impact beyond the states that join the treaties. To illustrate: even though some of the large producers of landmines have not joined the MBC, there is no longer an international market in landmines thanks to the treaty. Thus apart from for limited national uses, the production of landmines is all but non-existent globally.

The destruction of illicit small arms and light weapons and the increased regulation of the arms trade to prevent the illegal and illicit trade – for example through an Arms Trade Treaty – makes the peaceful resolution of conflicts more likely and reduces the incidence of armed violence, including gender violence, significantly.

Tackling the terrifying problems of weapons of mass destruction is vital for the future of our planet. As we said in the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (more commonly referred to as the Blix Commission):

“Nuclear, biological and chemical arms are the most inhumane of all weapons. Designed to terrify as well as destroy, they can, in the hands of either states or non-state actors, cause destruction on a vastly greater scale than any conventional weapons, and their impact is far more indiscriminate and long-lasting.”

“Nuclear weapons must never again be used – by states or by terrorists – and the only way to be sure of that is to get rid of them before someone, somewhere is tempted to use them. Today, we are in a dangerous situation. There has been a third wave of nuclear proliferation. Proliferation has not been halted and serious steps to outlaw nuclear weapons have not been taken. Nuclear weapons are (explosive) remnants of the Cold War. It is time to outlaw them..”

There is now international work towards a nuclear weapons convention, as proposed by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (– or as it is known: ICAN, you can, we can!).

Other weapons systems, such as missiles, anti-satellite weapons, weapons in outer space, thermobaric weapons and tools of

cyberwafare must all come under scrutiny for the damage they do to our species and our planet and they should also be placed on the agenda for urgent action.

It is my contention that we need to engage with governments, academics and NGOs around the world on a new disarmament framework - a Comprehensive Humanitarian Agenda for Disarmament.

For this to work we need whatever we do to have real meaning

What ever their systems, all states are accountable to their citizens, for their actions and for the way they use collective resources. Using valuable intellect, time and money to produce treaties that would have little impact will not engage States that take accountability seriously and will not engage civil society because it would not be worth the effort.

UNIDIR has been carrying out a multiyear research project entitled: Disarmament as Humanitarian Action: Rethinking Multilateralism. The results of this research lead us to conclude that the key thing in disarmament negotiations is to keep the bar high. The focus on human security means that we should be carrying out disarmament

negotiations that will make a difference in reality. We need to focus on the results we will produce, not just go through the motions of a negotiation that will keep even those that produce weapons feeling happy, comfortable and unaffected. The people-centered approach demands highly effective outcomes not lowest common denominator results.

We need to look at all weapons systems through a humanitarian lens. We all work better with the input of knowledge and wisdom from field-based practitioners, the academic and research institutions, international organizations and trans-national civil society.

A collaborative approach across disciplines and expertise, involving both women and men, ensures that the focus is on the affected people, it increases the diversity of our knowledge and our understanding of the whole problem. It enriches the work of officials and builds long-lasting capacity in government structures, in the research institutes and in advocacy communities alike.

Individuals matter. Political action is not just about instructions from capitals or mandates from elections, or organization membership it is also about the skills that negotiators bring to bear, their knowledge, expertise and sustained efforts. It is about structures working practices

and the creativity diplomats, academics and advocates alike can bring to the table.

In this room, we form what is called a community of practice – a group of people, in this case academics, who, over a period of time, share in some set of social practices geared toward some common social purpose. In the UN we have other communities of practice such as the Conference on Disarmament and the UN Disarmament Commission. Each has its own practices including rules and procedures, roles and hierarchies, like-minded-groups, cigarette breaks, power lunches and so on. An understanding of how each of these works in this community, compared with other communities in other forums is what makes this a community of practice.

In this way, UN diplomats are far more than mouthpieces of their governments. Their interactions with each other matter. If they are dynamic or lazy, it matters. If they have compassion and empathy it matters. Their personalities matter. Their commitment matters. How they deal with each other matters. How they deal with complexity matters. The technical, social, economic aspects of weapons systems are all interconnected and their understanding of this complexity, as well as their understanding of the specifics of each aspect, is crucial to success.

We know from complexity theory and social interactive dynamics, that phase transitions, or tipping points, can occur very suddenly in such situations. For example, we can go from a year of success to year after year of complete failure. The upside is that these tipping points can move us in other directions also. We could be at one of those points now re cluster munitions as an example and nuclear disarmament as another. We need to be prepared, to be ready to take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself to us to make real progress.

A great deal of research is being carried out in the scientific and economic fields on cooperation and trust – a vital ingredient for progress on human security. UNIDIR has been learning from other disciplines such as economics, psychology, epidemiology, physics, mathematics and so on as to how we can build trust and negotiate better. I don't have the time to delve into this now but please visit the Disarmament as Humanitarian Action section of www.unidir.org or visit our blog on www.disarmamentinsight.blogspot.com for further information and stimulation.

What we have learned is that we require fluid, pragmatic approach to groups and coalitions – specifically around certain issues. We have

seen successful attempts at this over the recent years – the most recent of which was in Dublin a few weeks ago when the CCM was negotiated. We need a comprehensive approach. An approach that is inclusive, broad in scope, wide coverage and extensive knowledge.

This means that we need cognitive diversity for success. We need a multiplicity of minds and expertise coming together to find a solution to a problem. We need the voices of the affected, the voices of those who are not normally heard, finding a resonance in the work of their representatives.

From the comprehensive approach comes the collaboration of civil society organizations, including governments, civil officials and academics, across information networks. A truly comprehensive, inclusive approach is now available to us with our interconnected, networked world and we are using technology to enhance our knowledge and effectiveness. Neither a top-down approach, nor a bottom-up approach is the way to work today. Rather an interdisciplinary collaboration of actors across political and geographic boundaries connected through a range of communication technologies is allowing us to work together as a species in new ways.

My final point is that the UN needs academia, it needs people with different ways of thinking. This is about increasing cognitive diversity in multilateral processes and negotiations. The UN and its structures are more open than people realize to outside expertise. I can only encourage each person here to engage with the UN disarmament structures so as to interact with delegates, to get your knowledge across and to learn so much yourself in the process.

[i] Memory of Solferino, Henri Dunant, 1862