

"Two categories of weapon are of special concern (to the United Nations): small arms and light weapons, because they currently kill most people in most wars; and nuclear weapons, because of their continuing terrifying potential for mass destruction."

From the Millennium Report

Vital statistics

- In 1945, only one nation possessed a nuclear bomb. Today, there are five officially recognized nuclear weapons States, and three nuclear-weapons capable States.
- World military expenditures peaked at over \$1 trillion in 1989. After a period of decline, it has begun to rise, reaching \$780 billion in 1999.
- More than 35,000 nuclear warheads are still stockpiled, many on high alert, ready to be launched on warning.
- Today, 80 per cent of the world's spending on armaments is on conventional weapons and weapons systems.
- Industrialized countries account for about 80 per cent of global military expenditures.
- The United States accounts for almost half of the world's total arms production: France and the United Kingdom for 10 per cent each; and Germany, Russia and Japan for roughly 4 per cent each.
- Arms transfers to developing countries are estimated at some \$30 billion a year.
- The countries affected by landmines are the least able to deal with the situation because of socio-economic difficulties.
- About 500 million small arms are in circulation worldwide.

Alfred Nobel, who invented dynamite and other explosives, was also the man who introduced the Nobel Prizes. In a letter to Baroness Bertha von Suttner, a writer and wellknown peace activist, he once said, "I do more for peace with my guns than you do with your disarmament lectures."

Nobel was a pacifist. He was convinced that the destructive power of his explosives would bring an end to war. He was wrong. Years later, in another letter, he noted armaments would only bring about the elimination of war when they were powerful enough to destroy not only the military forces but the civilian population as well. Within a few decades after Nobel's death, the world reached that stage. It gained the capacity to destroy itself not just once but many times over. The world was radically changed in August 1945 when it entered the age of nuclear warfare. On 6 August, the first atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, immediately killing more than 78,000 people and wounding another 40,000. Half the city was destroyed. Three days later, a second bomb completely destroyed Nagasaki, killing 40,000 people.

Weapons vs. the United Nations

Weapons of mass destruction and the United Nations belong to the same generation. One represents the single greatest threat to the survival of mankind; the other, our strongest defence against that threat.

The UN Charter was written in the first half of

What would happen if we had a major nuclear war?

Yumiko Yamamoto was only 10, a fifth grade pupil at Yagami Elementary School in Nagasaki, when the bombing took place. Eleven years later, at the age of 21, she was worried. A son was born two years later and a daughter the following year.

1945 by the representatives of 50 nations gathered in San Francisco. One of its fundamental goals was saving the "succeeding generations from the scourge of war." Two and a half months after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were leveled by nuclear blasts, the Charter came into force, formally establishing the United Nations. It was designed to be a new tool for building a system of international law and maintaining international peace and security.

Hope for a peaceful world after the Second World War was soon replaced by fear. Deteriorating relations among States, and particularly among the Security Council's permanent members, undermined the system of collective security outlined in the Charter. During this period, better known as the years of "cold war", progress for arms reduction was painfully slow.

In the 1990s, with the "cold war" finally over, the world was past the rivalry between the east and the west. This helped achieve significant gains in the area of disarmament: a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty was concluded; a convention banning landmines and another convention banning production, use or stockpiling of chemical weapons went into force. Nuclear weapons numbers almost halved; and world military expenditure declined by some 30 per cent between 1990 and 1998.

Much of this was possible due to the efforts of the United Nations.

Regrettably, our world still remains a dangerous place. Dozens of wars are still fought at local levels; weapons stockpiles continue to grow; more people train for war every day; and the costs of the arms race remain prohibitively high.

Weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons

The devastation of nuclear weapons is rivalled by the death and destruction possible with chemical, bacteriological and conventional weapons. Like nuclear weapons, chemical and biological weapons are considered weapons of mass destruction.

- Chemical weapons such as nerve gas can cause almost instantaneous death. Binary weapons, which consist of two chemical agents that are not highly toxic independently but become so in combination, are also lethal.
- Biological weapons, based on microbial

Junko Mine, her daughter, began to suffer bleeding in the nose after finishing elementary school. In April 1974, she died of leukaemia.

Eleven years later Yumiko lost her son, too. Like Junko, he suffered from chronic nosebleeds and died of leukaemia. The date was 6 August 1975, the thirtieth anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

What would happen if two-thirds of the world's nuclear weapons were used, half of them exploding over cities?

Experts involved in a 1987-88 UN study concluded that nuclear war on this scale would immediately kill over 1 billion people. As many people might be injured, and more affected in the subsequent months. It would also entail a high risk of environmental disruption. Smoke and dust in the atmosphere would reduce sunlight and warmth reaching the Earth's surface; temperatures would be so low that they could affect crop growth. The protective layer of ozone in the atmosphere would also be depleted, leaving the Earth vulnerable to increased ultraviolet radiation.

The suffering of the survivors would be unparalleled.

Small arms and light weapons: big threats

"In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms indeed could well be described as "weapons of mass destruction," said Mr. Annan.

While the United Nations has helped negotiate agreed measures to control nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, currently there are no such measures on controlling small arms and light weapons. This is one reason that States represented in the UN General Assembly decided in December 1999 to convene the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its

or other living organisms or toxins, can cause slow, painful death to thousands if used in densely populated areas.

- Conventional weapons include "traditional" weapons used on land, sea and in the air. The world arsenal of conventional weapons was recently estimated at 140,000 main battle-tanks; 35,000 combat aircraft; 21,000 helicopters; 1,000 major surface warships; and 900 attack submarines. Over 80 per cent of all military expenditure is spent on conventional weapons and forces.

Small arms are weapons designed for personal use, while light weapons are designed for use by several persons serving as a crew. Examples of small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine-guns. Light weapons include heavy machine-guns, some types of grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, and portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems. These weapons now present a greater danger than ever before.

Landmines

Every 20 minutes someone is either killed or maimed by a landmine. At the beginning of the 20th century, nearly 80 per cent of landmine victims were military personnel. Today, nearly 80 per cent of landmine victims are civilians.

"A landmine is a perfect soldier. Ever courageous, never sleeps, never misses".

Once laid, an antipersonnel mine can remain active for as many as fifty years. And clearing them is no easy task. It's a laborious, expensive process. A landmine may cost as little as \$3 but could cost between \$300 and \$1,000 a day to clear. Landmine devices like the "butterfly" lure children – who think they are picking up toys – with their attractive appearance.

Aspects.

"In Cambodia I saw first hand the effects of landmine use. I did not see opposition armies diverted or land held by the particular army in situ. What I saw were young children on crutches or blind, and young mothers with no legs, stripped of their ability to raise their children or find productive work. I saw from helicopters huge swathes of fertile land that would be left uncultivated for years to come because of the presence of mines."

Yasushi Akashi, former UN Under-Secretary-General, who supervised Cambodia's transition to multi-party democracy.

Why disarmament?

Take a minute to count from 1 to 60. By the time you finish, the world has lost about 30 children to malnutrition, hunger and curable diseases. During the same time, the world has also spent \$1.7 million for military purposes.

Countries' preoccupation with security has fuelled the arms race. Military spending reduces the limited resources available for promoting economic and social development in many societies. Various estimates have been made of the economic and social costs of the arms race. Consider the following:

- It costs as much to arm and train one soldier as it does to educate 80 children; to build one modern bomber as it did to wipe out smallpox over a 10-year period; to build the latest nuclear-missile submarine as it does to build 450,000 homes.
- At the current rate, the entire UN system could run for two centuries on one year's outlay of the world's military spending.
- To build 11 radar-evading bombers, the world needs about \$24 billion. With the same amount of money, it could provide four years of primary education for the 135 million children currently not in school.

Arms accumulation and economic development both require large-scale human and material resources. But since resources are limited, pursuit of either process tends to be at the expense of the other. There is a growing consensus that, in the long run, the world can either continue to pursue the arms race or achieve and sustain social and economic development for the benefit of all. It cannot do both.

Armed conflicts are not the only threats to a country's security. Today, hunger, malnutrition and disease kill as many people in two days as the Hiroshima bomb. Even if only a fraction of military spending were redirected to peaceful purposes, living standards and economic and social development would significantly improve.

Disarmament for development

Broadly understood, "disarmament" is a process of reducing the size of and expenditures on armed forces, dismantling and destroying weapons, progressively eliminating the capacity to produce new weapons, and releasing military personnel and integrating them into civilian life. "Development" refers to social and economic changes in society, which improve the quality of life for all.

Policy-makers in some countries oppose the use of the word "disarmament", partly because it is assumed to mean discarding weapons altogether, and partly because they view it as too narrow a term. They prefer the expression "arms control": a regime regulating, constraining or reducing weapons and military activities according to the terms of specific policies or agreements. Other countries have maintained that "arms control" does not necessarily imply a commitment to limit and reduce arms, and favour the term "disarmament".

"Security" is a condition in which States feel protected against actual, potential or perceived threats to their independence, sovereignty and political institutions. In the absence of an effective guarantee of their security, nations continue to seek security in military terms by exercising their inherent right of individual or collective self-defence.

Growing global interdependence may lead to a new, non-military perception of security. Poor or negative economic growth and social development, large-scale unemployment, scarcity of resources, threats to food and energy supplies and severe environmental degradation can jeopardize both national and

The United Nations as a forum for disarmament

General and complete disarmament under effective international control remains a main goal of the UN. Its immediate objectives are to eliminate the danger of war, particularly nuclear war, and to implement measures to halt and reverse the arms race, clearing the path towards lasting peace.

The General Assembly, the UN's main deliberative body, considers all international security and disarmament questions. In recent years, the Assembly has adopted some 60 resolutions per year on such issues. The General Assembly has devoted three special sessions to the question of disarmament. The Disarmament Commission, a subsidiary body of the Assembly consisting of all Member States, provides an annual forum for discussion of specific disarmament issues. The Conference on Disarmament is the international community's single multilateral forum for negotiating agreements. Sixty-six States are members of the Conference.

- Within the UN Secretariat, the Department for Disarmament Affairs provides substantive and organizational support to the bodies concerned with disarmament and to expert groups carrying out specific studies; it also prepares reports and undertakes research. It implements a disarmament information programme launched in 1982 to promote worldwide support and understanding for arms limitation and disarmament; it is also responsible for three regional centres for peace and disarmament in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

international security.

Disarmament may actually enhance security. It is widely recognized that a State's military strength cannot go beyond its economic base, and that a widening gap between the two is a serious security problem. Besides, no State can ultimately ensure its own security at the cost of another State's security, real or perceived. Joint actions by States to tackle non-military threats to security, coupled with efforts towards disarmament, improve prospects for a more secure world. Also, arms limitation agreements, both at the regional and global levels, would cost little in comparison with the continuation of the arms race.

- An autonomous UN Institute for Disarmament Research at Geneva, financed by voluntary contributions, carries out independent research on disarmament and related problems, particularly international security issues.

Signs of progress: United Nations action in the field of disarmament

The UN has played a role, either as negotiating forum or catalyst, in the conclusion of a number of arms control or disarmament agreements:

- The Antarctic Treaty (1959) prohibits in the Antarctic zone any military manoeuvres, weapons tests, building of military installations or disposal of radioactive wastes produced by military activities. The Treaty represented the first practical expression of the concept of the "nuclear-free zone" later applied to other treaties established in various regions.
- The Partial Test-Ban Treaty (1963) prohibits nuclear tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water.
- Treaty of Tlatelolco (1967) establishes a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The Outer Space Treaty (1967) mandates that outer space be used for peaceful purposes only and that nuclear weapons not be placed or tested in outer space.
- The Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968) prohibits the spread of nuclear weapons from nuclear to non-nuclear countries while facilitating the exchange of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, and commits the nuclear-weapon States to negotiate measures to end the nuclear arms race. With 187 States parties, NPT has become the most universally recognized international security treaty

Twin challenges

Fifty-nine years ago, President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the United States spoke of his vision of four essential freedoms. The freedom from fear was fourth on his list. This goal was "no vision of a distant millennium," President Roosevelt said. "It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation."

In his Millennium Report, issued in advance of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations General Assembly (6-8 September 2000), Secretary-General Kofi Annan invokes Roosevelt's words to challenge the world leaders to ensure the freedom from fear for all living beings. To this end, he identifies two areas for priority action: eliminating nuclear weapons and banning illicit trade in small arms.

Nuclear weapons: The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) marks a milestone in the history of efforts in favour of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It enjoys wide international support and is expected to have a complex control regime in place by the time it enters into force. As of 26 July 2000, 155 countries have signed the treaty, 60 of which have also ratified it.

However, when in 1998 India and Pakistan exploded nuclear devices, global nuclear disarmament efforts suffered a serious setback. Both countries – along with Israel and Cuba – continue to remain outside the non-proliferation treaty. Over a dozen of the 44 countries required to bring the CTBT into force have yet to ratify the treaty, including two nuclear-weapon states (China and the United

in history. In 1995, States parties to the treaty decided to extend indefinitely its provisions.

- The Sea-Bed Treaty (1971) bans the placement of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction on or under the seabed, outside a 12-mile coastal zone around each country.
- The Convention on Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons (1972) is considered the first international agreement providing for genuine disarmament -- that is, banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.
- Treaty of Rarotonga (1985) establishes a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the South Pacific.
- The Chemical Weapons Convention, signed in 1993 and effective since 1997, outlaws an entire class of weapons of mass destruction
- The Bangkok Treaty (1995) establishes a nuclear-weapons-free zone in Southeast Asia.
- Pelindaba Treaty (1996) established a nuclear-weapons-free zone for Africa.
- The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (1996) bans nuclear-test explosions in all environments (atmosphere, outer space, under water and underground).
- The Mine-ban Convention (1997) completely bans the production, export and use of landmines.
- In 1996, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion to the effect that States were under obligation to pursue and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict international supervision

A new disarmament agenda

As the world enters a new millennium, the United Nations is slowly putting in place a new arms control and disarmament regime. Jayantha Dhanapala, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, has spelled out the various elements of this new agenda in the following terms:

1. Deeper cuts in existing nuclear arsenals;
2. Preventing arms race in outer space;
3. Eliminating battlefield nuclear weapons; encouraging all nuclear-weapon countries to

States). Bilateral negotiations between the USA and the Russian Federation on reduction of nuclear arsenals have also slowed down. The US plan to deploy a national missile defence system has caused serious concern as it may undermine the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

To reverse the current trend, the Secretary-General has suggested three things:

- Reaffirmation of political commitment at the highest levels on nuclear disarmament;
- Convening a major international conference to help identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers; and
- Agreement with all concerned parties before any missile defence system is deployed.

The 2000 Review Conference of the NPT took some practical steps towards nuclear disarmament. The nuclear-weapon States agreed to an "unequivocal" undertaking "to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament". To that end, those States agreed on the following: to make further efforts to reduce their arsenals unilaterally, to increase transparency with regard to their nuclear weapons capabilities, to further reduce on-strategic nuclear weapons, to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems, to diminish the role for nuclear weapons in security policies and, as soon as appropriate, to engage together in the process leading to the total elimination of their nuclear weapons.

Small arms: Small arms and light weapons are the "weapons of choice" in today's predominantly internal conflicts – relatively cheap, lethal, portable and concealable, longlasting and so easy to operate that children as young as 10 have carried them into combat. They are being increasingly used in civil wars, often among armed groups within a country. Africa, where many of the world's deadliest wars are being fought, has become a dumping ground for much of the world's surplus small arms, in countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone. They are the tools of combat in other parts of the world such as Afghanistan in Asia, Colombia in Latin America and Chechnya in Europe. Even if internal conflicts grind to a halt, small arms still remain a threat to civil society because they are used by criminals, drug traffickers and terrorists or illicitly trafficked by these groups to other

endorse a no-first-use policy;

4. Halting the production of all unsafeguarded weapons-useable nuclear materials;
5. Ensuring universal membership in NPT, CWC, BWC and entry into force of the CTBT;
6. Promoting "disarmament for development";
7. Pursuing a "culture of prevention" rather than a "culture of reaction";
8. Strengthening the UN to promote peace and security;
9. Promoting greater transparency of data about military expenditure and arms trade.

Yet, as advisable as all of these initiatives may be, they still fall short of what is needed. In fact, disarmament alone will not erase the threat of war or ensure peace. As Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's former President, said:

"War is not caused by weapons; these are simply implements used in war. Real and sustainable peace is therefore not obtained simply by abolishing armaments. For the basis of war is injustice; and the foundation of real peace is justice and equality."

By providing a mechanism for preventing and defusing international conflicts, and promoting economic and social development and respect for human rights, the United Nations works towards establishing the conditions that make disarmament and peace possible.

States.

- In parts of Africa, one could buy a deadly assault rifle for the price of a chicken or a bag of maize.

About half the world's trade in small arms is legal; the other half illegal. In many instances, States exporting small arms legally to other States are unable to ensure that their exports reach the intended destination. Other States are unable to maintain governmental control over their weapons stockpiles; sometimes unscrupulous officials are even involved in selling or diverting arms from depots. States affected by proliferation of small arms are unable to prevent traffickers from running illicit small arms through their porous borders.

As the United Nations considers that controlling the illicit trade as a necessary first step in combating the proliferation of small arms, it will convene a major UN conference to discuss the illicit trade in small arms in all its aspects in 2001. The Secretary-General has urged Member States to take advantage of the 2001 Conference to start taking serious actions that will curtail the illicit traffic in small arms.

Even if we stop illicit arms trade, what would happen to many millions of small arms currently in circulation? The Secretary-General's suggestion: use market incentives to secure them back. In return for weapons, individuals may receive tools, such as sewing machines, bicycles, hoes and construction materials. Such non-monetary reimbursement schemes have worked in countries like Albania, El Salvador, Mozambique and Panama.