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THE 'GREATEST DANGER', UN SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS, NOVEMBER 28, 2006

In Lecture at Princeton university, Secretary-General calls for progress on both nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, Secretary-General SG/SM/110767, November 28, 2006.

Following is the text of today's lecture by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at Princeton University:

Let me begin by saying how delighted I am to have been invited to give this address by a School named after Woodrow Wilson, the great pioneer of multilateralism and advocate of world peace, who argued, among other things, for agreed international limits on deadly weapons.

Princeton is indissolubly linked with the memory of Albert Einstein and many other great scientists who played a role in making this country the first nuclear power. That makes it an especially appropriate setting for my address this evening, because my main theme is the danger of nuclear weapons, and the urgent need to confront that danger by preventing proliferation and promoting disarmament, both at once. I shall argue that these two objectives -- disarmament and non-proliferation -- are inextricably linked, and that to achieve progress on either front we must also advance on the other.

Almost everyone in today's world feels insecure, but not everyone feels insecure about the same thing. Different threats seem more urgent to people in different parts of the world.

Probably the largest number would give priority to economic and social threats, including poverty, environmental degradation and infectious disease.

Others might stress inter-State conflict; yet others internal conflict, including civil war. Many people - especially but not only in the developed world -- would now put terrorism at the top of their list.

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In truth, all these threats are interconnected, and all cut across national frontiers. We need common global strategies to deal with all of them -- and indeed, Governments are coming together to work out and implement such strategies, in the UN and elsewhere. The one area where there is a total lack of any common strategy is the one that may well present the greatest danger of all: the area of nuclear weapons.

Why do I consider it the greatest danger? For three reasons:

First, nuclear weapons present a unique existential threat to all humanity.

Secondly, the nuclear non-proliferation regime now faces a major crisis of confidence. North Korea has withdrawn from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while India, Israel, and Pakistan have never joined it. There are, at least, serious questions about the nature of Iran's nuclear programme. And this, in turn, raises questions about the legitimacy, and credibility, of the case-by-case approach to non-proliferation that the existing nuclear powers have adopted.

Thirdly, the rise of terrorism, with the danger that nuclear weapons might be acquired by terrorists, greatly increases the danger that they will be used.

Yet, despite the grave, all-encompassing nature of this threat, the Governments of the world are addressing it selectively, not comprehensively.

In one way, that's understandable. The very idea of global self-annihilation is unbearable to think about. But, that is no excuse. We must try to imagine the human and environmental consequences of a nuclear bomb exploding in one, or even in several, major world cities -- or indeed of an all-out confrontation between two nuclear-armed States.

In focusing on nuclear weapons, I am not seeking to minimize the problem of chemical and biological ones, which are also weapons of mass destruction, and are banned under international treaties. Indeed, perhaps the most important, under-addressed threat relating to terrorism -- one which acutely requires new thinking -- is the threat of terrorists using a biological weapon.

But, nuclear weapons are the most dangerous. Even a single bomb can destroy an entire city, as we know from the terrible example of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and today, there are bombs many times as powerful as those. These weapons pose a unique threat to humanity as a whole.

Forty years ago, understanding that this danger must be avoided at all costs, nearly all States in the world came together and forged a grand bargain, embodied in the NPT.

In essence, that treaty was a contract between the recognized nuclear-weapon States at that time and the rest of the international community. The nuclear-weapon States undertook to negotiate in good faith on nuclear disarmament, to prevent proliferation, and to facilitate the peaceful use of nuclear energy, while separately declaring that they would refrain from threatening non-nuclear-weapon States with nuclear weapons. In return, the rest committed themselves not to acquire or manufacture nuclear weapons, and to place all their nuclear activities under the verification of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Thus, the treaty was designed both to prevent proliferation and to advance disarmament, while assuring the right of all States, under specified conditions, to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

From 1970 -- when it entered into force -- until quite recently, the NPT was widely seen as a cornerstone of global security. It had confounded the dire predictions of its critics. Nuclear weapons did not -- and still have not -- spread to dozens of States, as John F. Kennedy and others predicted in the 1960s. In fact, more States have given up their ambitions for nuclear weapons than have acquired them.

And yet, in recent years, the NPT has come under withering criticism -- because the international community has been unable to agree how to apply it to specific crises in South Asia, the Korean peninsula and the Middle East; and because a few States parties to the treaty are allegedly pursuing their own nuclear-weapon capabilities.

Twice in 2005, Governments had a chance to strengthen the Treaty's foundations -- first at the Review Conference in May, then at the World Summit in September. Both times they failed -- essentially because they couldn't agree whether non-proliferation or disarmament should come first.

The advocates of "non-proliferation first" -- mainly nuclear-weapon States and their supporters -- believe the main danger arises not from nuclear weapons as such, but from the character of those who possess them, and therefore, from the spread of nuclear weapons to new States and to non-state actors (so called "horizontal proliferation"). The nuclear-weapon States say they have carried out significant disarmament since the end of the cold war, but that their responsibility for international peace and security requires them to maintain a nuclear deterrent.

"Disarmament first" advocates, on the other hand, say that the world is most imperilled by existing nuclear arsenals and their continual improvement (so called "vertical

proliferation"). Many non-nuclear-weapon States accuse the nuclear-weapon States of retreating from commitments they made in 1995 (when the NPT was extended indefinitely) and reiterated as recently as the year 2000. For these countries, the NPT "grand bargain" has become a swindle. They note that the UN Security Council has often described the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as a threat to international peace and security, but has never declared that nuclear weapons in and of themselves are such a threat. They see no serious movement towards nuclear disarmament, and claim that the lack of such movement presages a permanent "apartheid" between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots".

Both sides in this debate feel that the existence of four additional States with nuclear weapons, outside the NPT, serves only to sharpen their argument.

The debate echoes a much older argument: are weapons a cause or a symptom of conflict? I believe both debates are sterile, counterproductive, and based on false dichotomies.

Arms build-ups can give rise to threats leading to conflict; and political conflicts can motivate the acquisition of arms. Efforts are needed both to reduce arms and to reduce conflict. Likewise, efforts are needed to achieve both disarmament and non-proliferation.

Yet, each side waits for the other to move. The result is that "mutually assured destruction" has been replaced by mutually assured paralysis. This sends a terrible signal of disunity and waning respect for the Treaty's authority. It creates a vacuum that can be exploited.

I said earlier this year that we are "sleepwalking towards disaster". In truth, it is worse than that -- we are asleep at the controls of a fast-moving aircraft. Unless we wake up and take control, the outcome is all too predictable.

An aircraft, of course, can remain airborne only if both wings are in working order. We cannot choose between non-proliferation and disarmament. We must tackle both tasks with the urgency they demand.

Allow me to offer my thoughts to each side in turn.

To those who insist on disarmament first, I say this:

-- Proliferation is not a threat only, or even mainly, to those who already have nuclear weapons. The more fingers there are on nuclear triggers, and the more those fingers

belong to leaders of unstable States -- or, even worse, non-State actors -- the greater the threat to all humankind.

-- Lack of progress on disarmament is no excuse for not addressing the dangers of proliferation. No State should imagine that, by pushing ahead with a nuclear-weapon programme, it can pose as a defender of the NPT; still less that it will persuade others to disarm.

-- I know some influential States, which themselves have scrupulously respected the Treaty, feel strongly that the nuclear-weapon States have not lived up to their disarmament obligations. But, they must be careful not to let their resentment put them on the side of the proliferators. They should state clearly that acquiring prohibited weapons never serves the cause of their elimination. Proliferation only makes disarmament even harder to achieve.

-- I urge all States to give credit where it is due. Acknowledge disarmament whenever it does occur. Applaud the moves which nuclear-weapon States have made, whether unilaterally or through negotiation, to reduce nuclear arsenals or prevent their expansion. Recognize that the nuclear-weapon States have virtually stopped producing new fissile material for weapons, and are maintaining moratoria on nuclear tests.

-- Likewise, support even small steps to contain proliferation, such as efforts to improve export controls on goods needed to make weapons of mass destruction, as mandated by Security Council resolution 1540.

-- And please support the efforts of the Director-General of the IAEA and others to find ways of guaranteeing that all States have access to fuel and services for their civilian nuclear programmes without spreading sensitive technology. Countries must be able to meet their growing energy needs through such programmes, but we cannot afford a world where more and more countries develop the most sensitive phases of the nuclear fuel cycle themselves.

-- Finally, do not encourage, or allow, any State to make its compliance with initiatives to eliminate nuclear weapons, or halt their proliferation, conditional on concessions from other States on other issues. The preservation of human life on this planet is too important to be used as a hostage.

To those who insist on non-proliferation first, I say this:

-- True, there has been some progress on nuclear disarmament since the end of the cold

war. Some States have removed many nuclear weapons from deployment, and eliminated whole classes of nuclear delivery systems. The US and Russia have agreed to limit the number of strategic nuclear weapons they deploy, and have removed non-strategic ones from ships and submarines; the US Congress refused to fund the so called "bunker-buster" bomb; most nuclear test sites have been closed; and there are national moratoria on nuclear tests, while three nuclear-weapon States -- France, Russia and the UK -- have ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

-- Yet, stockpiles remain alarmingly high: 27,000 nuclear weapons reportedly remain in service, of which about 12,000 are actively deployed.

-- Some States seem to believe they need fewer weapons, but smaller and more useable ones -- and even to have embraced the notion of using such weapons in conflict. All of the NPT nuclear-weapon States are modernizing their nuclear arsenals or their delivery systems. They should not imagine that this will be accepted as compatible with the NPT. Everyone will see it for what it is: a euphemism for nuclear re-armament.

-- Nor is it clear how these States propose to deal with the four nuclear-weapon-capable States outside the NPT. They warn against a nuclear domino effect, if this or that country is allowed to acquire a nuclear capability, but they do not seem to know how to prevent it, or how to respond to it once it has happened. Surely they should at least consider attempting a "reverse domino effect", in which systematic and sustained reductions in nuclear arsenals would devalue the currency of nuclear weapons, and encourage others to follow suit.

-- Instead, by clinging to and modernizing their own arsenals, even when there is no obvious threat to their national security that nuclear weapons could deter, nuclear-weapon States encourage others -- particularly those that do face real threats in their own region -- to regard nuclear weapons as essential, both to their security and to their status. It would be much easier to confront proliferators, if the very existence of nuclear weapons were universally acknowledged as dangerous and ultimately illegitimate.

-- Similarly, States that wish to discourage others from undertaking nuclear or missile tests could argue their case much more convincingly if they themselves moved quickly to bring the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force, halt their own missile testing, and negotiate a robust multilateral instrument regulating missiles. Such steps would do more than anything else to advance the cause of non-proliferation.

-- Important Powers such as Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Japan have shown, by refusing to develop them, that nuclear weapons are not essential to either security or

status. South Africa destroyed its arsenal and joined the NPT. Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan gave up nuclear weapons from the former Soviet nuclear arsenal. And Libya has abandoned its nuclear and chemical weapons programmes. The nuclear weapon States have applauded all these examples. They should follow them.

-- Finally, Governments and civil society in many countries are increasingly questioning the relevance of the cold war doctrine of nuclear deterrence -- the rationale used by all States that possess nuclear weapons -- in an age of growing threats from non-State actors. Do we not need, instead, to develop agreed strategies for preventing proliferation?

-- For all these reasons, I call on all the States with nuclear weapons to develop concrete plans -- with specific timetables -- for implementing their disarmament commitments. And I urge them to make a joint declaration of intent to achieve the progressive elimination of all nuclear weapons, under strict and effective international control.

In short, my friends, the only way forward is to make progress on both fronts -- non-proliferation and disarmament -- at once. And we will not achieve this unless at the same time we deal effectively with the threat of terrorism, as well as the threats, both real and rhetorical, which drive particular States or regimes to seek security, however misguidedly, by developing or acquiring nuclear weapons.

It is a complex and daunting task, which calls for leadership, for the establishment of trust, for dialogue and negotiation. But first of all, we need a renewed debate, which must be inclusive, must respect the norms of international negotiations, and must reaffirm the multilateral approach -- Woodrow Wilson's approach, firmly grounded in international institutions, treaties, rules, and norms of appropriate behaviour.

Let me conclude by appealing to young people everywhere, since there are -- I am glad to see -- so many of them here today.

My dear young friends, you are already admirably engaged in the struggle for global development, for human rights and to protect the environment. Please bring your energy and imagination to this debate. Help us to seize control of the rogue aircraft on which humanity has embarked, and bring it to a safe landing before it is too late.

Source: United Nations, <http://www.un.org>.

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