

First Committee: General Debate

Statement by Hon'ble Mr. Saleem Shervani, MP on October 6, 2000

Mr. Chairman,

The Indian delegation extends to you its sincere congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. It is indeed a pleasure to see you, a representative of a country that has played a prominent role in the field of nuclear disarmament, chairing the First Committee of the Millennium Assembly. We are confident that you will be able to steer the work of this Committee to a fruitful outcome. My delegation pledges its full cooperation to you in your endeavours.

At the dawn of a new century, the First Committee this year has the responsibility to chart a course on the basis of a collective reappraisal of the past, a realistic assessment of where we stand at present, and a practical and meaningful look at the future. Our deliberations must also be underpinned by the understanding that in the emerging multipolar-world only a plural security order can deal with the challenges to international peace and security.

For over half a century, the international community has failed to effectively address the threat posed by nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapon States Parties to the NPT and their allies attribute salience to the role of nuclear weapons in their security calculus; new doctrines and justifications for the continued retention of nuclear weapons have been developed and nuclear sharing arrangements maintained. Such an approach is contrary to the principle of equal and legitimate security for all necessary for enhancing international peace and security and to recall the historic advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 1996 which unanimously concluded that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control".

In the post-Cold War period, there cannot be any justification for thousands of nuclear weapons being maintained in a state of hair-trigger alert creating unacceptable risks of unintentional or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons that could have disastrous consequences for humankind. The international community is fully entitled to clear commitments from all nuclear weapon States to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. A number of specific proposals and measures for achieving global nuclear disarmament have been put forward by States, groups of States, individuals or NGOs attributing the highest priority for steps to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons. India's initiative two years ago in the shape of a resolution entitled "Reducing Nuclear Danger" received wide-ranging support in the General Assembly. India proposes to reintroduce its Resolution this year also with the expectation that steps will be urgently taken to reduce the risks posed by hair-trigger alert postures and related doctrines of use. In this context, India fully supports the UN Secretary General's proposal, noted by the Millennium Declaration, for an international conference to seriously address and effectively eliminate nuclear dangers.

India has traditionally attached and continues to attach the highest priority to nuclear disarmament. Even today, India remains the only nuclear weapon State ready to commence multilateral negotiations aimed at creating a nuclear weapon-free world thus responding positively to the ICJ's advisory opinion. In fact, for five decades, India raised its voice for universal, verifiable nuclear disarmament. In pursuit of this policy objective, India has been in the forefront of initiatives and proposals concerning nuclear disarmament that are well-known to all. Regrettably, Mr. Chairman, these proposals were disregarded and instead emerged a discriminatory non-proliferation regime underpinned by a Treaty that has frozen the status quo of 1967 while turning a Nelson's eye to reality.

India was forced to develop its nuclear option because the NPT nuclear weapon States refused to accept the almost universal demand for nuclear disarmament, while the proliferation of nuclear weapons and delivery systems continued unabated in our neighbourhood. However, our policy is based on responsibility and restraint with 'minimum nuclear deterrence' and 'no-first-use' defining the deployment posture, along with a civilian command and control structure. India stands ready to strengthen its undertaking on no-first-use by entering into bilateral agreements on no-first-use or a multilateral instrument on a global no-first-use of nuclear weapons, which would meet the demand for unqualified negative security assurances raised by a large majority of non-nuclear weapon states.

After a limited series of tests in May 1998, India declared a voluntary moratorium on further underground nuclear test explosions. This meets the basic obligation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Developments in other countries indicate that the CTBT is not a simple issue and requires a consensual approach. India is committed to building a consensus nationally for creating a possible environment to sign the Treaty. India also expects that other countries will adhere to this Treaty without conditions. We have made it clear that India will not stand in the way of the Treaty's entry-into-force.

India joined the consensus on the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) Resolution 53/77I adopted at the General Assembly in 1998. This procedural Resolution, adopted without a vote, reaffirmed the substance of Resolution 48/75L adopted by the General Assembly in 1993. India is ready to participate constructively, and in good faith, in these negotiations in order to develop a Treaty to prohibit the future production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear devices which is non-discriminatory and verifiable.

The Conference on Disarmament must respond to the priorities of the global disarmament agenda. The international community's highest priority remains the establishment of an Ad-hoc Committee on Nuclear Disarmament. There are several proposals for consideration in the CD, including those put forward by the Group of 21, the most recent in September 2000 reiterating and reaffirming the G-21 Statement of January 2000, and documents CD/1570 and CD/1571 on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified framework of time, including a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The Conference on Disarmament - as the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament - should fully utilize mechanisms provided in its Rules of Procedure for building the consensus necessary for future negotiations within the

framework of a Programme of Work which reflects the priorities and interests of all delegations.

India has viewed the progressive de-legitimisation of nuclear weapons as essential to the achievement of a nuclear weapon free world just as the 1925 Geneva Protocol led to the Chemical Weapons Convention that eliminated an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, as in the previous years, India along with other co-sponsors proposes to bring forward a Resolution on a Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons.

India has consistently maintained that nuclear weapons-free zones cannot do justice to the wide variety of concerns emanating from the global nature of the threat posed by nuclear weapons. At the same time, we respect the sovereign choice exercised by non-nuclear weapon States in establishing nuclear weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the states of the region concerned. In this connection, we note with satisfaction that the UN Disarmament Commission was able to reach agreement in 1999 on this subject and has provided useful consensus Guidelines to be borne in mind while considering further measures to reduce the global threat posed by nuclear weapons. At the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), India has reiterated that it fully respects the status of the nuclear weapon-free zone in South-East Asia and is ready to convert this commitment into a legal obligation. India remains responsive to the expressed need for such commitments to other nuclear weapon-free zones also. India is prepared to extend all necessary commitments for the early realization of the nuclear weapon-free zone in Central Asia and for interaction with states of Central Asia including in the framework of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

India remains fully committed to maintaining and further strengthening its already effective and transparent system of export controls of technologies, in line with the objectives of non-proliferation in all its aspects without affecting the peaceful applications of these dual use technologies. As a developing country, India has had to pay a high developmental cost due to the existence of discriminatory export control mechanisms some of which are contrary to existing treaty provisions. India supports multilaterally negotiated, universally accepted, non-discriminatory guidelines for international transfers concerning dual use technologies and high technologies with military applications. With a view to carrying forward the consideration of the role of science and technology in the context of international security and disarmament, India along with other co-sponsors, proposes to bring forward the Resolution titled 'The Role of Science and Technology in the Context of International Security and Disarmament' this year also.

Mr. Chairman, as an original State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, India has discharged its obligations fully and met all its commitments faithfully. It is the continuing responsibility of all States Parties to the CWC to ensure that all the provisions of the Convention are fully and effectively implemented.

As a State Party to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, India has been an active and constructive participant in the on-going negotiations in the Ad-hoc Group in Geneva for a Protocol that not only strengthens the implementation of the BTW Convention

from the security angle, but also gives full expression to the developmental needs. Such a balanced approach would contribute to the conclusion of a universally- acceptable, legally-binding instrument to strengthen the Convention. We hope that these negotiations, undertaken according to the agreed mandate, will yield results as soon as possible before the Fifth Review Conference.

Arms limitations and disarmament treaties need to be implemented fully and in good faith in order to contribute to stability. Unilateral actions perceived to be inconsistent with treaties reduce prospects for progress in nuclear disarmament, a goal to which we are firmly committed. To date, the missile proliferation challenge has been tackled through selective approaches based on alliances and informal approaches relating to technology denial regimes. In recent years, missile defence systems have been put forward as a possible answer. These are unlikely to provide a satisfactory solution and concerns relating to missile proliferation need to be addressed through genuine multilateralism and efforts to diminish the salience of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

India has consistently opposed the weaponisation of Outer Space, described in international treaty law as the common heritage of humankind. The Conference on Disarmament in Geneva was unable during its 2000 session to address issues relating to the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. India was one of the co-sponsors of Resolution 54/53 which reiterated that the CD has the primary responsibility for negotiations of a multilateral agreement or agreements, as appropriate, on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in all its aspects as existing legal instruments are inadequate to deter imminent attempts for the further militarisation of Outer Space and to preserve its non-weaponisation. Technological development including in ballistic missile defences could result in opening new areas of competition and arms race. India supports the early commencement of negotiations in the CD on an appropriate instrument that would, as a first step, ensure the non-weaponisation of space while at the same time preserving the use of space for the full range of cooperative, peaceful and developmental activities.

The question of small arms transfer can basically be divided into two categories - licit state-to-state transfers to meet the legitimate needs of States for self-defence, maintenance of international peace and security, and for participation in UN peace keeping operations; and illicit arms transfers often in pernicious nexus with cross- border terrorism, drug trafficking and organised crime. Illicit trade in small arms and light weapons involving diversion to non-State entities has implications not only for the security of states but also their economic and social development. The international community has recognised this as one of the priority problems and accordingly is convening an international conference in 2001. India supports the convening of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light weapons in all its aspects. The proposed Conference, while reiterating the principle of legitimacy of legal trade, needs to also cover transfers that have a risk of becoming a source of illicit diversion and circulation. The Conference should adopt an integrated approach to ammunition and explosives. India believes that priority for international action lies in breaking the nexus between small arms proliferation, international terrorism, drug smuggling, organised crime and money laundering and the 'grey markets' that feed this link. India participated actively in the first session of the Preparatory Committee earlier this year, and will continue to engage constructively in the preparatory process for the Conference. India also intends to contribute actively to the study by the Secretary General requested by General Assembly

Resolution 54/54V on the feasibility of restricting the manufacture and trade of small arms and light weapons to the manufacturers and dealers authorised by States.

India remains committed to the objective of a non-discriminatory, universal and global ban on anti-personnel mines through a phased process that addresses the legitimate defence requirements of states, while at the same time, ameliorating the critical humanitarian crises that have resulted from an irresponsible transfer and indiscriminate use of landmines. We believe that a phased approach commends itself as a confidence building process, enabling states particularly with long borders like India to move ahead while remaining sensitive to safeguarding their legitimate security requirements. The process of complete elimination of APLs will be facilitated by addressing the legitimate defensive role of anti-personnel landmines for operational requirements under the defence doctrines of the countries concerned, through the availability of appropriate militarily-effective, non-lethal and cost-effective alternative technologies. In this context, India attaches importance to the full and unhampered transfer of technology related to mine detection/clearance as well as international assistance. India would support negotiations in the CD on a ban on transfers of anti-personnel landmines on the basis of a mandate that reflects the interests of all delegations. India has been an active participant in the CCW process having ratified all its Protocols including the Amended Protocol II on Landmines.

The United Nations Disarmament Commission has with the 2000 Substantive Session started a new three-year cycle of focussed deliberations on the agreed topics - "Ways and Means to Achieve Nuclear Disarmament"; and "Practical Confidence Building Measures in the Field of Conventional Arms". The UNDC has a special responsibility for promoting and enhancing the international disarmament agenda by providing the deliberative inputs through formulation of consensus recommendations keeping in mind the overall objective of the disarmament agenda. India has been, and will continue to remain, an active participant in the in-depth and substantive discussions on these two important topics.

Mr. Chairman, as we enter the new millennium, let us resolve to intensify efforts aimed at strengthening international peace and security. The Cold War compartmentalisation of security complexes is no longer valid. Therefore the test for measures to be discussed and negotiated successfully, will be their global and non-discriminatory nature that enhances security for all. The quest for unilateral security advantage for a few, or the assertion of the right to an exclusive standard of national security, is contrary to the spirit of a durable and sustainable system of international security in today's world. The First Committee should be resolute in resisting such trends in order that the international community can begin to successfully address the challenges of the new millennium.