Engaging States on a Comprehensive Humanitarian Agenda for Disarmament

Talk synopsis:

Success in multilateral disarmament and arms control has been hard to obtain in recent years. There is an urgent need for new, creative approaches in order to make progress because continued failure is engendering real human costs. Those costs are being borne by enormous numbers of people now - through the use of weapons in wars and in crime – and in the future, unbearable costs will be borne by our whole species – indeed by the whole planet – if wars are ever again fought with weapons of mass destruction. Where limited progress in disarmament has been achieved, it is because the devastating impact of the weapons involved has been understood. Disarmament negotiations work better when carried out through a humanitarian lens. They work better with the input of field-based practitioners, international organizations, researchers and trans-national civil society. This collaborative approach ensures that the focus in on the affected people, it enriches the work of officials and builds long-lasting capacity in government structures, in the research institutes and in advocacy communities alike. While the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention is perhaps the most prominent example of such partnership, there have also been other, lower-profile initiatives that have achieved results. What can we learn from them about broadening the concept of \textit{disarmament as humanitarian action} with a view to tackling current and future challenges related to armed violence?
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Ladies, gentlemen, colleagues and friends

Allow me first to thank the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Peace Research Institute and to all of you here for granting me the privilege of addressing you on this happy occasion.

I just want - for a second - to remember a Great in this community who died recently: Ambassador Clive Pearson – who represented New Zealand at the mine ban negotiations in Oslo 10 years ago.

On behalf of myself, my colleagues at UNIDIR and all of you who knew him, I am dedicating this presentation to his memory and friendship. He would have loved to have been here with us today and was so proud to have been part of this.

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Mr Chairmen:

18 September seems to be a day for agreeing peace and disarmament: three important agreements of the past 30 years were finalized on 18 September: the 1978 Camp David agreement; the 1987 intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty; and the mine ban convention in Oslo ten years ago. And in three days time it is - fittingly - the annual international day of peace.

So it is with great confidence that I speak here today, on this anniversary so important to humanity. I am here, in this week for peace, to engage with you on developing a comprehensive, humanitarian agenda for disarmament.

I want to unpack exactly what we mean by these words in order for us all to engage in finding this path to a better future, the opening to which was cleared by the collaborative process that led to the Mine Ban Convention ten years ago today.

1. Comprehensive

Let’s begin with the word comprehensive, which means “Inclusive, broad in scope, wide coverage and extensive knowledge”.

It is about cognitive diversity, it is about a multiplicity of minds and expertise coming together to find a solution to a problem. It is about a gathering of governments and non-governmental organizations who share a common goal. It is about the voices of the affected, the voices of those who are not normally heard, finding a resonance in the work of their representatives.

It is all of us, gathered here and in other places to mark the success of a truly comprehensive, humanitarian approach to disarmament that leads to the abolition of abhorrent weapons such as
anti-personnel landmines and at the same time clears up the minefields and assists those who have been blighted by their impact.

From the comprehensive approach comes the collaboration of civil society organizations, including governments and civil officials, 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.

2. Humanitarian

Humanitarian is my next word

- In 1862, Henri Dunant \(^1\) 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”. Indeed, the link between weapons control and humanitarian action was obvious in the mind of the founder of modern day humanitarianism

- 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. 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.

- For example, the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibits the use of asphyxiating gases in war and the use of bacteriological methods of warfare, led to the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention. It was the horror and disgust at the use of such indiscriminate and inhumane weapons - along with the increasing awareness that they afforded little, if any, military advantage on the battlefield - that prompted governments to eventually outlaw them completely.

- 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. There are new moves afoot on cluster munitions and a programme of action on small arms and light weapons is leading to useful national, regional and international action to reduce and prevent armed violence.

3. Agenda:

So the disarmament agenda up until recent years has been 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 addition, of course, the agenda was driven and constrained by the politics of large powers and their allies.

However, not since the negotiation of the Mine Ban Convention, have we seen significant success in disarmament treaty negotiations. The Conference on Disarmament has not begun negotiations since a three-week stint in 1998 and its last success was in 1996.

On the 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 and it has never been updated. Imagine that; the agenda has remained the same for nearly thirty years. I know that we say that disarmament takes time - but really!

The UN Programme of Action on the illicit trade in SALW has been a successful process. It has produced a significant improvement in national laws and regulations, a serious of important regional measures, norms and treaties and international measures to help prevent the diversion of weapons into illicit possession.

On the bilateral and regional side, things are not getting better. Existing Treaties are under threat –such as the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty or the INF Treaty – and in 2009, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, with all of its verification and confidence-building measures comes to an end.

We are, I feel, 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.

Now - more than ever - we need new, creative approaches. We could – and indeed, we must - push for radical reform of multilateral disarmament practices but we also cannot – and indeed we must not – wait passively for that reform to take place. To reform the agenda we need agents of change.
4. **For**
Engaging States on a Comprehensive Humanitarian Agenda **For** Disarmament

The word “for” is proactive, it is not neutral, it is decidedly in favour. It is not a word that allows us to stand at the sidelines and watch complaining that things are not going well or fast enough. No.

The word “for” is deliberate.

It forces us to choose: action or inaction? People or personal gain? Security for all or for only a few? You choose.

5. **Disarmament**

What is needed next- what choices should we make?

“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.

- In the here-and-now, the **removal** of antipersonnel landmines - and other ordnance that lie 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.

- Next on the list **for sure** is cluster munitions. Alongside CCW discussions in Geneva, a promising new Oslo Process on cluster munitions has emerged to negotiate a humanitarian treaty that tackles the hazards of the lethal, indiscriminate and inhumane weapons to civilians.

- The Oslo process has developed a critical mass of commitment in a remarkably short period of time: 80 countries are now part of the Oslo process that began here in February and many more are sure to follow.

- 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.”

- And let’s do that by working 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 cyberwarfare 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.

6. Engaging States

- To engage with each on a Comprehensive Humanitarian Agenda for Disarmament 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 will have little impact will not engage States that take accountability seriously.

- The **Key** thing 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 of these 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.

- This collaborative approach across disciplines and expertise 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.

- We all understand that individuals matter. Political action is not just about instructions from capitals or mandates from elections, or organization membership it is also about your skills as negotiators, your knowledge, your expertise and your sustained efforts. It is about
structures working practices and the creativity diplomats and advocates alike can bring to bear.

- In this room, you form what is called a community of practice – a group of people who, over a period of time, share in some set of social practices geared toward some common social purpose.

Those practices include:
- Rules and procedures, Roles and hierarchies, Like-minded-groups, coffee breaks and so on........etc..
- An understanding of how each of these works in this mine ban community, compared with other communities in other forums is what makes this a community of practice.
- In this way of course, you are - each of you - more than mouthpieces of your governments or organizations. Your interactions with each other matter. You are dynamic. You have compassion and empathy. Your personalities matter. Your commitment matters. How you deal with each other matters. How you deal with complexity matters. The technical, social, economic aspects of weapons systems are all interconnected and your understanding of this complexity, as well as your 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.
- There are a number of ways in which we can approach building trust.
- For example, it has been found that when people work in teams or groups, agreements are easier to reach when negotiations are framed as “win some - lose some” situations and compromise is required. Whereas agreements are harder to reach when the outcome is framed as an all-or-nothing end game.
- Working in teams develops allows individuals to pool their knowledge and ideas and compromise more easily because they do not perceive compromise as self-sacrifice, rather they see themselves as part of a team working together in which give and take is a vital part of the process. Indeed the Mine Ban Convention owes a great deal to this understanding.
• However, there is a downside to working in groups. Whilst two or three like-minded individuals in a group can foster cooperation and effective communication, they can inadvertently have the effect of alienating others and decreasing trust with partners outside the group. There seems to be a fine line between working effectively as a team to create agreement and having the opposite effect!

• We know that group culture makes a large difference in group cooperation. If people believe that others are cooperating then they are more likely to cooperate. For example if people believe that cheating on taxes, or on parking restrictions in the centre of a city, is widespread and can be carried out without impunity, then they are more likely to cheat. The reverse is true.

• Research shows that social pressure – rewards and punishments – encourages cooperation in negotiations. Establishing personal trusting relationships can be used to good effect to persuade actors to follow social norms. And the larger the group, the larger the social pressure, and the stronger the influence. So large, tightly knit groups with clear, shared objectives can persuade those in disagreement to follow the rules.

• In terms of negotiating dynamics it seems that we need to work in groups to be most effective. Large groups provide social pressure and a diverse range of knowledge, expertise and experience. BUT in groups larger than about 150 interlocutors, humans find it hard to keep track. Communication is strained to its limits. In this respect modern negotiations are pushing us beyond our cognitive limits. These limits make it hard for us within the international system to develop and sustain social trust.

• We work better in small groups. Like-minded coalitions of about twenty-eight people can be very effective in encouraging agreement. A group of this size allows for strong social bonding and development of working rapport and trust. Such a group can then reach out to others, individuals and groups, to present their coherent views and build on their approach to reach a larger number.

• However, groups like this can – if great care is not taken – be viewed with suspicion by those outside the group. One effective way is a process of intersecting like-minded groups, each of which could be a mix of civil society representatives AND states negotiators.

• Cooperation across groups can achieve the shared objective and achieve an end goal. Research clearly demonstrates that action provides cohesion within and across groups. All talk and no action, will serve to quickly undermine group cohesion.

• One possibility to make the best of both large group and small group negotiating dynamics, would be multi-track processes. The tracks would allow all members of a larger group to work in small groups. These tracks can be governmental, (called track one), non-governmental (called track two) or a mixture of both governments and non-governmental experts.
• 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 and this is of course why we can be here today celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Mine Ban Convention. A success in progress.

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1 Memory of Solferino, Henri Dunant, 1862