



**Speech by Mr. Michael Møller
United Nations Under-Secretary General
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva**

“High-Level Exchange of the First Committee of the 72nd General Assembly”

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**Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen:**

I am pleased to be part of this timely discussion, alongside my distinguished colleagues from the disarmament community, on the current state of affairs in the field of international security and disarmament. And I am particularly pleased that we have a dedicated debate on the impact of new technologies on disarmament, the international security architecture and the non-proliferation agenda. It was high time that we do so.

International Geneva continues to be an important hub for disarmament issues. Home to an array of disarmament bodies, scientific research centres, civil society organisations and governance innovation initiatives, Geneva is a major and growing centre for conversations about the impact of new and emerging technologies. It is also an incubator for creative thinking about governance and regulatory regimes. Geneva holds tremendous promise to address today’s challenges to the world’s disarmament regime. The Conference on Disarmament is a, currently underutilized, central tool for doing just that.

**Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

When the UN Secretary-General took office, he reminded us all that “The United Nations was born from war. Today, we must be here for peace”. Key to any discussion on peace and prevention of conflict and disarmament is the question of how to channel scientific advances and technical progress for the common good.

Innovations in technology have always shaped the international security landscape. But now, technologies are evolving and converging at unprecedented speed, bringing into view a future we have only begun to imagine and a future we don't yet know how to govern. Our current tools of governance are not fit for today's, and much less for tomorrow's challenges. We are reaching new levels of interdependence, in which the global security landscape resembles a vast and complex web. Where something on one corner of the globe can have significant impact on every other, whether it's a microorganism, a line of code, or a single algorithm.

The Secretary-General addressed the General Assembly earlier this month stating that the dark side of innovation has moved from the frontier to the front door. A development that none of us is fully prepared for, and one where traditional forms of regulation simply do not apply. It requires not only a global intellectual 'reboot', but also a new generation of thinkers and doers.

But as a "techno-optimist", I firmly believe that the recent wave of technological change has the clear potential to bring vast benefits to humankind.

Access to science and knowledge is boundless and transcends borders. Technology is instrumental in delivering on our commitments on sustainable development. However, in a governance and ethical vacuum, even the most positive and inspiring technological advances that bring our societies together can be repurposed with dangerous consequences. This presents significant challenges that might permanently alter the international security landscape, destabilize fragile balances of power, entrench disparities between countries and herald chaos with profound humanitarian impact.

The future of warfare will likely be guided by technologies that will dramatically increase the speed of the battle, define how it is fought, where it will take place and who will be involved and affected.

Too often, arms control deliberations are held on the basis of narrow mandates in separate disarmament bodies within the United Nations. This disjointed approach is increasingly detrimental to any meaningful global oversight and arms control regime. In order to develop a meaningful governance model, we need to always remember the fact that technology is not neutral. It's the basis for human development, but it can and will also be misused. Ultimately, technology is a magnifier of human intentions, aptitudes and biases.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament set up a disarmament machinery that was meant to deliver better results. The relationship between deliberative and negotiating bodies and the General Assembly was carefully calibrated. Today, there is a general sense that that balance is lost and needs to be reassessed.

Rising global tensions and divergent interests have led to fragmentation and discord, which, in many instances, has undermined the work of multilateral institutions. Moreover, in a fraught situation where many are wondering “where do we go from here?”, the maintenance of the status quo seems, for many, the safest option.

Progress in science and technology is outpacing the current speed of discussions in international fora. Industry should and sometimes is playing an increasingly important role. The United Nations family needs to meaningfully engage with industry players on responsible innovation and data management to ensure that scientific advances and technological developments are contributing to a world of equal rights and access to social progress, as outlined in the Charter.

A meaningful interaction also requires us, the UN, to stay true to our purpose, clear on the value we add and frank about the achievements we made – while remaining honest about where we could, and still can, do better. This is the only way to establish partnerships that will yield sustainable results.

**Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

The Conference on Disarmament is a unique body with clear untapped potential. Over the years, but in the increasingly distant past, this body has proven its important role and capacities beyond serving as a treaty-making factory. We have seen how the CD has contributed to effective measures for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control that have played a crucial role in conflict prevention, risk mitigation and reduction, de-escalation and in reducing tensions.

When the High Representative spoke to the CD last September, she pointed out that the CD had reached an important point of convergence – recognising that something needs to be done to bring it back to where it should be. I have seen the great commitment of many Member States of the CD during the serious and in-depth discussions that took place within the Way Ahead Working Group at the 2017 session of the Conference on Disarmament. It has given me some measure of hope that it can be reinvigorated into the effective primary disarmament body the world so urgently needs.

To do so, the time has come for us to really consider if the current set up of the CD has become more of a roadblock than a vehicle to advance disarmament. Rather than trying to fix it piece by piece, can we agree on a new approach, asking: What are our priorities going forward? What do we want to achieve, and where do we go from here?

How do we remedy the current stalemate arising from the all-powerful notion of consensus? Finding consensus means searching for a solution that we can all support, even if it is not our first or favourite option. Moreover, innovative ways of consensus decision-making, as put in place by the International Organization for Standardization, for example, have proven to be effective and efficient. We should also ask if consensus is needed for all decisions in the CD.

Therefore, as we quickly approach the fortieth anniversary of the CD, let me ask you this: Can this Conference again become a place, as envisioned in the 1978 founding document and demonstrated time and time again, where we deliberate and negotiate some of the most pressing challenges in international security? Can this forum become an incubator for ideas and dialogue, a source of knowledge for conversations that continue or even move beyond the confines of its meeting room? Armed with a renewed sense of urgency can we jointly identify a different path forward?

In light of today's game-changing technological developments, the Conference on Disarmament could become the place the world desperately needs to come together and address the impact of emerging technologies on international security and the existing disarmament architecture. We have had several discussions already on frontier issues and the increasing weaponization of new technologies, which proved very valuable.

With reports of the heightened risks of cyber-attacks on nuclear facilities, States should look into existing and potential avenues within the CD for further dialogue and confidence-building measures, building upon the excellent work done by Groups of Governmental Experts on this issue.

Last time we met, I referred to the importance of achieving progress on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. Ably led by Canada, the work of the High-level Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) expert preparatory group is promising. With States possessing such thorough knowledge of the issue and clear understanding of their national security interests, it is my hope that negotiations could – in fact – start soon in the Conference on Disarmament.

I fully recognise that the divergences in positions remain deep, particularly on the issue of stocks. However, the very idea of “negotiations” would have never existed if only like-minded States were to develop international legal instruments.

The engagement with civil society is important. I initiated the first Conference on Disarmament-Civil Society Forum in 2015, followed by a second forum in 2016. Time and time again, civil society organizations have proven to be key contributors to disarmament debates. In light of ongoing technological advancements, their participation is needed more than ever.

In other disarmament fora, such as the discussions on LAWS in the CCW and on synthetic biology in the context of the BWC, civil society have proven to be working at the forefront of technological change. Therefore, I will continue to militate for a more transparent and constructive engagement in a formalised way between the CD, civil society and other relevant stakeholders.

In this context, allow me to warmly congratulate the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) for receiving this year's Nobel Peace Prize. ICAN has been a strong and tireless proponent of nuclear disarmament over the past decade. This Nobel Prize is timely as nuclear disarmament is again at the forefront of global concerns. It is also a welcome and strong validation of the importance of civil society organisations as key partners in our collective effort to rid the world of nuclear weapons. And it is a call for action to the Conference of Disarmament, to not allow nuclear issues to continue to divide the Conference, and to re-commit to the issues that should urgently be addressed by the Conference (including the threat of nuclear build-up and confrontation).

Together, we can make the CD a place where we ignite the vision of global peace put forth by our predecessors, and where we think and act with an unrelenting commitment to international security.

I urge you to take up the tasks entrusted to you with the sense and urgency they deserve. We can build on the mutual trust we have developed over all these years and continue to move forward with a shared vision and a renewed purpose.

**Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is time for us to make full use of our disarmament machinery and the potential it holds. The onus is on you to reassume leadership and act.

As Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, you can count on my support.

Thank you.