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## Seventy-fifth session

Item 105 of the provisional agenda\*

### **Review of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its tenth special session**

## **Work of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

At its seventy-third session, held from 29 to 31 January 2020 in Geneva, the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters began a two-year programme of work by holding in-depth discussions about ongoing changes in the international security environment and their impact on current approaches to nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. Taking into account the increasingly complex and multipolar international security environment, the Board engaged in creative and forward thinking about ways to revitalize and modernize the disarmament architecture and machinery. In the outcomes, the Board identified challenges that such a new approach should address, explored practical ways forward and discussed principles to guide its thinking.

The Board identified the need for a diverse and modern diplomatic and cooperative action toolkit to address tensions between States, increase effective bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral dialogue, enhance transparency and reduce strategic competition among nuclear-weapon States. Furthermore, the Board underscored that any new approach to nuclear disarmament and arms control needed to be rooted in a shared vision for a world free of nuclear weapons that was based on verifiability, irreversibility and transparency, was aimed at closing certain gaps in arms control measures and advanced the security of humanity. The Board explored several practical ways forward, including legally binding, political and other types of normative approaches to advancing nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control, as well as undertaking small-scale practical efforts, mobilizing political leadership and engaging civil society.

The members of the Board emphasized the importance of the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and expressed their belief that a positive outcome was in the interest of all States

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\* [A/75/150](#).



parties. They sent a letter to the Secretary-General to that effect, proposing specific actions that he might take.

At its seventy-fourth session, held on 15, 19, 24 and 25 June 2020, the Board continued its deliberations in an online setting owing to restrictions on in-person meetings resulting from the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Board examined two subtopics, namely, emerging technologies and challenges, and advancing disarmament and arms control in a changing international environment.

On the subtopic of emerging technologies and challenges, the Board noted the impact that recent and emerging weapon technologies were having on nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control, as well as the need for new efforts to facilitate critical discussion among Member States through, among other things, strategic dialogue, reinvigorated arms control processes, the possible creation of new informal platforms to engage with experts and actors from the private sector, and the strengthening of the capacity of existing forums to generate new ideas. Under the second subtopic, advancing disarmament and arms control in a changing international environment, the Board discussed possible approaches aimed at preserving and, subsequently, extending cooperative arms control actions. Also, it considered ways to engage both non-nuclear-weapon and nuclear-weapon States in the current multipolar security environment.

The Board strongly supported action by the Secretary-General to continue to robustly promote and defend the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Noting that the year 2020 marked the passage of 75 years since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Board stressed that there was an urgent need to augment public awareness of the continued risks posed by weapons of mass destruction and to mobilize mass public support for decisive action on arms control and disarmament. In that context, the Board discussed how other prominent issues of global concern, in particular the climate crisis and the pandemic, offered lessons on public engagement of disarmament-related issues.

In its capacity as the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the Board engaged in substantive discussions on two of the Institute's workstreams: weapons and ammunition management, and autonomous weapons and human control. The Board also reviewed current programmes, activities and finances of the Institute, including ongoing efforts to strengthen its policy impact, achieve financial sustainability and further expand its global engagement. The Board approved the report of the Director on the activities of the Institute for the period from January 2019 to December 2019 and the proposed programme of work and financial plan for 2020 and 2021. Lastly, the Board endorsed a proposal by the Institute to commemorate its fortieth anniversary in 2020, in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and with an emphasis on engaging women and youth on disarmament matters.

## I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held its seventy-third session in Geneva from 29 January to 31 January 2020 and its seventy-fourth session on 15, 19, 24 and 25 June 2020 in an online setting. The global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic prevented the Board from meeting in person in New York in June as originally planned, prompting it instead to meet in an online setting on a compressed schedule. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [38/183](#) (O). As it is only halfway through a two-year programme of work, the present report reflects key considerations to date. More formal recommendations will be made to the Secretary-General following the Board's seventy-sixth session. The report of the Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) was approved by the Advisory Board in its capacity as the Institute's Board of Trustees (see [A/75/134](#)).

2. Selma Ashipala-Musavyi (Namibia) presided as Chair over both sessions of the Advisory Board in 2020.

## II. Substantive discussions

3. Over the course of its seventy-third and seventy-fourth sessions, the Advisory Board began a two-year programme of work. The Secretary-General asked the Advisory Board to reflect on alternative approaches and a potential new vision for nuclear disarmament and arms control, including possible principles and elements.

4. At both sessions, the Board was briefed by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs. In her remarks, the High Representative provided an overview of the multiple and interconnected challenges facing the international community and affecting global arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. These included an international security environment characterized by an absence of trust and dialogue, militarization of international affairs, heightened regional tensions, the erosion of bilateral arms control agreements, the accumulation of new weapons, the growing size and sophistication of global strategic arsenals, and seemingly unrestricted military spending.

5. The High Representative noted the possible challenges that emerging technologies may pose to existing legal, humanitarian and ethical norms, and principles related to non-proliferation and international and peace and security, should they not be given careful attention. Scientific and technological developments, while bringing benefits to millions, also carry with them new risks, including to old weapons-related technologies, lowering barriers to access and potentially opening new domains for conflict. Also, a closer look needed to be taken at options to address the current gap in international discussions around missiles and missile defence. Meanwhile, increasing tensions between States on topics related to peace and security had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, further underscoring the need to identify viable paths towards renewing dialogue between States on disarmament and arms control measures. In the context of these multiple interconnected challenges, the High Representative emphasized that Board needed to identify appropriate processes and approaches that would enable States to find common ground in these areas.

6. Addressing the seventy-fourth session, the Secretary-General asked the Board to provide him with concrete recommendations on what a new vision for arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament in today's world might look like, and what specifically the United Nations could contribute to reinvigorate disarmament processes and take nuclear disarmament and arms control forward. The Secretary-General noted that it had been two years since the launch of his disarmament agenda,

*Securing Our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament*, and while encouraging progress had been made towards its implementation, he noted that there was a need to overcome deep divisions and a lack of dialogue between States. In that regard, he underscored that any new vision should be a bridge from the lessons of the past and the gains made in preventing nuclear war, to the emerging challenges of the twenty-first century.

7. During their first two sessions, the Board heard presentations by experts in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control in which they explored key concepts, alternative approaches and a new vision on nuclear disarmament and arms control.

## **A. The changing global security environment**

8. The Board welcomed the opportunity provided by the Secretary-General to consider and provide a set of strategic and tangible recommendations in support of a new approach to disarmament and arms control in a challenging and ever-changing international security environment.

9. With the pandemic serving as a reminder that global risks with devastating consequences can emerge with little warning, the Board emphasized that the international community must do everything in its power to prevent the global catastrophe that would result from the use of nuclear weapons, whether that use is intentional, accidental or the result of miscalculation. The Board reaffirmed that nuclear weapons continued to pose an existential threat to the world.

10. Affirming that the international community must continue to pursue a world free of nuclear weapons, the Board nevertheless acknowledged the challenges that nuclear disarmament and arms control efforts faced in an increasingly fraught and complex geopolitical environment. Unlike during the Cold War, when the international system and the institutions devoted to disarmament were dominated by a bipolar world order, the present global nuclear environment is multipolar and regional.

11. Underscoring that disarmament and arms control were key measures to creating a safer and more secure world, members were of the view that the international community was witnessing the erosion of arms control agreements, dangerous rhetoric about the use of nuclear weapons and uncertainty about the continuation of existing agreements. Most notable were the demise of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the breakdown of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the recent announcement by the United States of America of its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on Open Skies and uncertain prospects of extension of the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty). A lack of trust and dialogue among States, strategic tensions concerning the issue of missiles, and technological developments such as in the fields of artificial intelligence and cybersecurity have, combined, created an increasingly complex international situation that threatens international peace and security.

12. The Board noted that this complex reality raised the following question: how can the international community effectively bring all States that are in possession of nuclear weapons, each with specific national security interests and strategic postures and relationships, into nuclear disarmament and arms control processes and agreements? The Board discussed the fact that that risks and potential hazards posed by technologically evolving capabilities and emerging challenges arising from new



domains and technologies require an appreciation of the interlinkages across a wide range of arms control issues.

13. Noting that the international community must do everything in its powers to prevent any further deterioration of the non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament regimes and preserve the hard-won agreements that are still in place, there was broad agreement among the Members concerning the need to contribute a constructive set of proposals to address the degraded international security situation. A new vision articulating the value of and ways forward for arms control and disarmament would serve the interests of all Member States.

14. The Board deliberated on the need to reframe and reconceptualize disarmament and arms control to adapt to the changing circumstances; to consider political drivers incentives and disincentives and brakes on competition; and measures that could be taken to increase levels of trust and collaboration. It engaged in a discussion and an exchange of views with Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London, who considered how stresses on the international system were eroding multilateralism, cooperation and transparency. The Board, in turn, examined the effects of that erosion on opportunities for disarmament and arms control, and ways in which the strained international security environment might lead to escalation and unintended consequences. Board members emphasized the value of confidence-building measures to rebuild confidence and to reduce and mitigate risk.

15. Board members noted that the pandemic had exacerbated tensions between States and posed several distinct challenges with regard to topics related to peace and security. Noting that it was still too early to identify all the pandemic's consequences, some members pointed out that increased public spending to combat the pandemic might present an opportunity to rethink and redirect global military expenditure and, potentially, prevent arms races. Members also noted that the pandemic had underscored the direct and indirect costs of biosecurity and biosafety breaches and underlined the critical importance of revitalizing the work of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction.

## **B. The changing international context for nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century**

16. During its deliberations on the changing international context for nuclear weapons in the twenty-first century, the Board was of the view that States that possess nuclear weapons should pursue policies to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, reduce the danger of nuclear war and contribute to disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

17. The Board considered what conditions served as “drivers” of or “brakes” on the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Also, the Board drew a link between nuclear proliferation and the degree to which States perceive existential threats to their national security interests. It was suggested that constraints on broad proliferation included the high costs associated with developing nuclear weapons, the ability of other States to inflict significant military damage in interventions to prevent the acquisition of such weapons and the availability of alternative means for States to successfully enhance their security and global standing.

18. The Board underscored that States must work together to take specific and irreversible steps to prepare for a world free of nuclear weapons, rooted in a shared vision for a world free of nuclear weapons that is verifiable, irreversible and transparent. States, in particular those in possession of nuclear weapons, should work

towards an improved political environment and renewed constructive engagement, dialogue and trust. To work towards a cooperative global security regime and address strategic unpredictability, the Board identified the need for a diverse and modern diplomatic toolkit capable of addressing tensions between States, increasing effective bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral dialogue, enhancing transparency and tamping down strategic competition among nuclear-weapon States.

19. The Board was briefed by John Borrie of UNIDIR who attributed contemporary strategic unpredictability to several trends, including greater multipolarity, strained relations between States, the deteriorating fabric of international institutions and norms, and technological developments. The presenter noted that anti-ballistic missile defences, hypersonic weapons and other advanced, long-range weapons, anti-satellite weapons, and cyber-, artificial intelligence and “lower-yield” nuclear weapons were current drivers of unpredictability.

20. Noting a prevailing trust deficit, both at the international level and in bilateral contexts, the members of the Board noted that the pursuit of innovative and traditional confidence-building measures could meaningfully contribute to rebuilding trust and to reducing and mitigating miscalculations and risk. Any approach should be taken in a gender-sensitive manner.

21. During its discussions, the Board noted that the year 2020 marked the passage of 75 years since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Board expressed concern about the limited public awareness around the globe of the continued risks presented by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, including those linked to the emergence of new technologies. The Board stressed that there was a need for a convincing narrative to mobilize public support for decisive action on arms control and disarmament. Its members discussed how other prominent issues of global concern, in particular the climate crisis and the pandemic, might provide important opportunities to increase public awareness and understanding of disarmament-related issues and promote serious debate on what constitutes human security and on how States could decisively incorporate the concept of human security in their policies.

22. The Board noted that, historically, pressure from civil society – in particular from women’s organizations – had been vital in helping to create incentives and pressures for action. It emphasized the important role of the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda in engaging with civil society, the public at large and other critical stakeholders and partners in order to mobilize public support for nuclear arms control and disarmament. In that regard, the suggestion was made that the Secretary-General appoint a special envoy for disarmament and civil society in order to give more prominence to the issue of arms control.

### **C. The status of current approaches to nuclear disarmament and arms control: are partial measures still fit for purpose?**

23. Anton Khlopkov, a member of the Board, delivered a presentation in which he evaluated the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime and arms control architecture. He noted that significant gains had been achieved since the height of the cold war in preventing proliferation, reducing nuclear arsenals and deployments of nuclear weapons, and disposing of weapons-usable nuclear material. The presenter also reflected on recent negative trends and constraints, which he attributed to a lack of strategic dialogue on arms control between the main States that possess nuclear weapons, and on a lack of progress with regard to outstanding treaty and negotiation commitments. The speaker also advocated, as a matter of priority, for the extension of the New START Treaty, regular

and comprehensive dialogue between the United States and the Russian Federation and for intensified dialogue among the five permanent members of the Security Council.

24. Board members were of the view that preserving existing treaties and agreements on nuclear disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation verification, and preventing the further erosion of existing disarmament and arms control frameworks were urgent and of the highest importance. The Board stressed that priority must be given to the extension of the New START Treaty for the full five years in order to avoid unconstrained nuclear competition while providing time to consider and conceptualize new approaches to arms control.

25. The Board affirmed that Member States should build on the norms and good practices of a system that had evolved over several decades. While noting that experience in negotiating arms control agreements was not equal across States in possession of nuclear weapons, the Board emphasized that there were valuable lessons to be learned from previous negotiations and the implementation of agreements.

26. Exploring ways to promote dialogue and cooperation, members of the Board underscored the need for a convincing narrative that highlighted the added value and feasibility of arms control, as well as the need for confidence-building measures designed to rebuild trust, re-establish habits of cooperation and reduce and mitigate risk. With regard to reducing and mitigating risk, it was suggested that lessons might be drawn from other areas of international peace and security practice, such as conflict mediation and management.

27. The subject was further explored in a briefing by Michael Krepon, co-founder and former President of the Stimson Center. He opened with a broad survey of arms control achievements by States during the previous 30 years. Turning to emerging challenges, he suggested that issues in the two domains most at risk of miscalculation and conflict – outer space and cyberspace – could be addressed most effectively through political and voluntary arrangements encouraging restraint, including codes of conduct. With regard to nuclear disarmament and arms control, the presenter acknowledged the utility of treaties and arsenal reductions, but, given the current environment, recommended an approach based on strengthening norms against the use of nuclear weapons in warfare, as well as against further nuclear proliferation or tests.

28. The Board reflected on the complementarity between a norms-based approach and existing legal frameworks and instruments, and discussed the potential role of partial measures. It was suggested that approaches based on norms and codes of conduct could fit well in some domains, such as cybersecurity and digital stability, but could not substitute treaties in the area of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

29. The Board discussed how such norms would be developed, what actors would drive the agenda and who might be engaged in monitoring and compliance, taking into account the role of international organizations such as the United Nations. The Board sought to clarify the role of verification mechanisms and it considered how to link such an approach with confidence-building measures and existing systems for crisis management.

30. The Board reaffirmed that States, in particular those possessing nuclear weapons, should work towards an improved political environment and renewed constructive engagement and dialogue. The members of the Board emphasized the importance of ensuring the success of the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, believing a positive outcome

to be in the interest of all States parties. In February 2020, upon concluding its seventy-third session, the Board submitted a letter to the Secretary-General about how, through his leadership and in his communications, he could help to impart to States parties the high stakes of the Conference, which had been postponed until no later than April 2021.

#### **D. Emerging challenges and new technologies**

31. At its seventy-fourth session, the Board deliberated on the impact of recent and emerging weapons technologies on nuclear disarmament and arms control in terms of their implications for international peace and security and in terms of their relevance to any future disarmament – nuclear or otherwise – and non-proliferation processes or arrangements.

32. The Board noted that various advances in science and technology in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, space-based technology and biological and chemical science could contribute to progress towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, they could also exacerbate existing security risks and create new ones, thereby opening new domains for conflict. If mismanaged, developments surrounding some of those technologies could diminish predictability and mutual trust, engender arms races and even, potentially, cause escalation to the use of nuclear weapons through miscalculation.

33. Members of the Board were of the view that the impact of new technologies, including technology related to cyberspace, outer space, artificial intelligence, chemical science and biological science, should be fully taken into consideration in pursuing effective disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control measures. One Board member circulated a paper on the role of multilateral forums in addressing emerging technologies, containing suggestions for taking a tiered and distributed approach to the development of norms and for engaging the private sector and other stakeholders.

34. The Board noted the necessity of having a comprehensive view on where technologies were affecting, entangling and influencing arms control frameworks and arrangements, and of tailored approaches for addressing specific intersection risks so as to increase transparency and create a climate of trust and predictability.

35. The Board noted the importance of ongoing intergovernmental initiatives aimed at addressing the various challenges posed by individual technologies or domains, such as on cyber-, space-based and lethal autonomous weapon systems. The Board underscored the need to address the intersection between technology and nuclear risks.

36. With novel weapon concepts rapidly emerging, the Board revisited the implications of capabilities such as hypersonic weapons, which could be used to launch attacks with unprecedented speed (see [A/71/176](#)). To that end, Michael Elleman, Director of Non-proliferation and Nuclear Policy Programme at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, provided Board members with insights on the evolution of hypersonic weapons. Various possible rationales for acquiring hypersonic capabilities were discussed, as were risks potentially posed by such capabilities and possible solutions for addressing such risks – and risks associated with missiles and their enabling technologies more broadly – within the framework of arms control. The speaker expressed concern that, while hypersonic weapons shared the ability of ballistic missiles to be fitted with either a nuclear or a conventional payload, they would substantially compress timelines for decision-making. This, in turn, could heighten the likelihood of a serious miscalculation

regarding the intent and target of an attack, significantly increasing crisis instability and the possibility of a nuclear crisis.

37. In considering whether constraints were needed on the development or deployment of hypersonic weapons, the Board examined the speaker's proposal that States adopt declaratory policies aimed at avoiding ambiguity around the type of warhead carried by a given hypersonic missile. In addition to addressing that question in the context of those strategic weapons, Board members discussed how States could distinguish any nuclear-armed theatre-range systems from those that were conventionally armed in order to decrease the risks of miscalculation.

38. The Board considered what processes and forums could be suitable for addressing the issue of hypersonic capabilities and deliberated the challenges and merits of including in such talks all States in possession of nuclear weapons that were currently developing hypersonic capabilities.

39. In that regard, it stressed the need for new efforts to facilitate critical and transparent discussion among Member States, notably nuclear-weapon States, including through strategic dialogue, reinvigorated arms control processes, the possible creation of new informal platforms to engage experts and the private sector, and strengthening the capacity of existing forums to generate new and innovative ideas. Some Board members underlined the importance of making full use of the existing mechanisms, such as through the First Committee of the General Assembly and the Conference on Disarmament, to precipitate constructive dialogue and concrete actions to energize arms control and disarmament efforts.

#### **E. The goals of and processes for arms control in a changing international environment**

40. The Board reiterated that States should build on the norms and good practices of a system that had evolved over several decades and discussed possible approaches to preserve and then extend cooperative nuclear disarmament and arms control actions. It noted that emphasis should be given to proposing a credible and achievable way forward that would, inter alia: sustain the taboo on the use of nuclear weapons and sustain nuclear testing moratoria; reverse the current erosion and avoid the collapse of the global arms control architecture and its norms by preserving existing treaties and agreements; prevent the acceleration of bilateral, plurilateral, multiparty strategic competition among States that possess nuclear weapons; address the risks of heightened strategic unpredictability, including from new and emerging technologies such as cyber-, artificial intelligence, space-based and hypersonic weapons and their interactions with nuclear weapons postures; reduce the role of nuclear weapons as instruments of statecraft; re-energize progress and advance a longer-term transition to a world without nuclear weapons; close certain gaps in arms control measures; and increase opportunities for effective bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral dialogue.

41. As the Board continued to explore actions that could facilitate a new framework for nuclear arms control and disarmament, its members agreed that a one-size-fits-all approach did not exist. While recognizing that multilateral forums had the advantage of being able to consider multiple important issues at once and provide a space where many countries can engage on issues of significant national interest, the Board saw merit in contemplating a road map that also included bilateral, regional and plurilateral approaches with a view to pursuing simultaneous and overlapping dialogues as necessary. Specific approaches would need to be tailored to the challenge and the unique national postures of States.

42. In that regard, the Board considered, *inter alia*, the interface between bilateral, plurilateral, regional and multilateral measures; ways to facilitate processes involving the five permanent Security Council members and others; the need for an interlinked dialogue on a wide range of arms control issues, including missile defence and the prevention of an arms race in outer space; and possibilities for linking qualitative and quantitative arms control efforts. The Board also examined the value of focusing on certain specific subtopics where concrete and tangible process could be made. In that respect, some members highlighted efforts made in the context of the negotiations for the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

43. The Board was briefed by Sharon Squassoni, Director of the global security programme at the Union of Concerned Scientists, and Sergey Rogov, Scientific Director of the Institute for United States and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

44. Ms. Squassoni underscored that both quantitative and qualitative aspects of arms races must be addressed, with significant attention paid to destabilizing capabilities and verification mechanisms. While noting recent negative trends in arms control, she also suggested that the global pandemic might present a unique opportunity to rally renewed commitment to disarmament and arms control measures. That called for renewed political dedication and robust leadership by States, most notably those States in possession of nuclear weapons.

45. Mr. Rogov reflected on the strained bilateral arms control regime in a multipolar world. He stressed that any successful new approach to nuclear disarmament and arms control would first require the extension of the New START Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States to prevent the further collapse of existing arms control arrangements. In the view of the presenter, all five permanent Security Council members should join the arms control process, albeit in different ways, to reflect their unique dimensions. He noted that future efforts in that area must be based on a recognition of the differing capabilities and deterrence postures among States that possess nuclear weapons and of the ways in which those corresponded to the geopolitical and technological realities of the twenty-first century. The speaker also emphasized the utility of aiming for political solutions and undertaking efforts to arrive at legally binding bilateral treaties. He underscored the imperative to address non-nuclear strategic weapons. The presenter argued that the Russian Federation and the United States needed to move towards the concept of “mutually assured security” and specifically highlighted the destabilizing effects of any intermediate range ground-launched cruise, ballistic and hypersonic missiles in the event of their deployment in Europe. He proposed that such deployment should be banned.

46. Board members underlined the urgent need to mobilize leadership and to rectify the current dearth of trust and confidence that existed among States in possession of nuclear weapons. Cognizant that nuclear disarmament and arms control did not take place in a vacuum, the Board dedicated time to exploring practical ways forward, including legally binding, political and other normative approaches to advancing nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control; small-scale practical efforts; multiple, overlapping dialogues and activities; processes involving the 5 permanent members of the Security Council (also known as “P5” processes), expanded P5 processes (also known as “P5+” processes); regional processes; and nuclear security summit-like processes. Some members felt that, in the current climate, comprehensive and in-depth dialogue between the five permanent members of the Security Council was essential to reduce risk and enhance trust.

47. In the view of the Board, it was indispensable that the Secretary-General continue to robustly promote and defend the vision of a world free of nuclear

weapons. The Board considered opportunities of which the Secretary-General could avail himself to advance disarmament and arms control measures in the changing international context. Those included: generating greater awareness and understanding among the wider public by engaging in targeted public outreach, including through periodic informal gatherings and disarmament education; promoting and strengthening the norm against nuclear testing, facilitating the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and continuing strong support for international organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency; offering the Secretary-General's good offices with a view to facilitating informal dialogues between States in an effort to build trust and common understanding. The Board discussed the merits of pursuing track II diplomatic processes and activities, including with scientific experts, as a means to build shared understanding, increase transparency and confidence and identify possible concrete measures to be taken.

## **F. Consideration of key elements for alternative approaches and a new vision for nuclear disarmament and arms control**

48. To structure its discussions, analysis and future recommendations on key elements of a new vision for and approaches to nuclear disarmament and arms control, the Board received a short paper from one of its members containing a broad and extensive view of possible components for future arms control processes.

49. Cognizant of the challenge of engaging both non-nuclear-weapon States and States that possess nuclear weapons in the current complex international environment, members of the Board considered a possible conceptual framework to outline key issues and possible pathways to address them. Those were: avoiding the complete collapse of bilateral arms control efforts while transitioning away from bilateral-only strategic arms control; identifying the main strategic issues that must be addressed and matching those issues to the instruments and tools available to address them; determining whether there were certain risks or challenges, with suitable measures to counter them, that could be separated from the broader agenda, thereby narrowing the scope to provide a clear set of realistic deliverables.

50. In addressing those challenges, the Board saw merit in identifying a comprehensive menu of arms control processes, mechanisms and approaches that could be tailored to different strategic problems, political-military relationships and regional contexts. Members also emphasized the importance of learning lessons from and building on past arms control and disarmament agreements and the importance of leadership moving ahead.

51. The Board underscored the possibility of taking a combination of approaches, depending on the issue. Those could but did not need to take the form of treaties. Consideration could also be given to, inter alia, negotiated political agreements; multilateral codes of conducts; negotiated parallel unilateral actions; unilateral actions; sustained, robust, high-level political-defence dialogue; informal dialogue between Member States and experts initiated by the Secretary-General; and the convening of groups of governmental experts and experts working groups. Such approaches should not detract from the urgency of multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

### **III. Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research**

52. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, acting in its role as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR, met twice in 2020, on 28 January in Geneva and on 24 June in an online setting.

53. At those meetings, the Director briefed the Board on the implementation of the Institute's activities. The Board welcomed the efforts UNIDIR had made in 2019 to diversify its research and ensure its operational and financial sustainability. The Board also commended UNIDIR for its efforts over the previous 18 months to enhance its functions, noting that the Institute was making a tangible contribution and bringing added value to Member States. The Board encouraged the Institute to continue to invest in efforts to measure, track, monitor and assess the outcomes and impact of its research and activities. The Board also endorsed the Institute's proposal to commemorate its fortieth anniversary in 2020 within the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and with emphasis on engaging women and young people on disarmament matters.

54. The Board acknowledged the significantly increased number of research publications (from 22 in 2018 to 42 in 2019) and range of activities, particularly the organization of events in various countries and regions. It underscored the value of active outreach and communication and took note of the Institute's strengthened online engagement and its diverse products, including videos.

55. Trustees encouraged the Institute to continue to play its convening role in facilitating dialogue and the development of practical ideas in the run-up to the coming Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, including on nuclear risk reduction, gender-based analysis and representation, the strengthening of compliance with regimes against weapons of mass destruction and the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction. The Board also supported the Institute's plan to convene a range of State and non-State actors to explore the implications of technological advances for weapons regulation and use. In addition, the Board anticipated that the Institute's convening function and research expertise in those areas would provide an important platform for exploring the future of nuclear arms control after the tenth Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

56. The Board engaged in substantive discussions on two UNIDIR workstreams: weapons and ammunition management, and autonomous weapons and human control. It recognized the importance of conventional arms control in addressing the security of States and the protection of civilians, given the changing nature of contemporary conflict. The holistic approach championed by the Institute and the practical applications of its work were seen as offering concrete tools and support to Member States in advancing their security and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Board encouraged UNIDIR to continue its applied research on weapons and ammunition management and to explore linkages with conflict prevention, peacebuilding, armed violence reduction and sustainable development initiatives at the regional and international levels.

57. The Board welcomed the Institute's new research in the area of autonomous weapons and human control, underscoring the significance of that research for the United Nations regarding all pillars of its work, including those beyond disarmament. The Board encouraged the Institute to incorporate ethical dimensions into its review of the military, legal and technical aspects of autonomy in weapon systems and to continue to provide a platform for sustained dialogue on new technologies between States on one hand and the private sector and other non-State actors on the other.



58. At its meeting held in June 2020, the Board considered and approved the proposed programme of work and financial plan for 2020 and 2021 (see [A/75/134](#)). The Board welcomed the report of the Director, which provided a comprehensive account of the Institute's expanded scope of activity across a range of diverse disarmament topics. The Board commended the Institute for its enhanced communications with broader audiences, including young people, and for its engagement with disarmament stakeholders in New York and in various regions of the world.

59. While noting that the pandemic had significantly affected the Institute's plans and programme of work for 2020, the Board took note with interest of the Institute's response, which had included the swift adoption of online modes of working, the establishment of a risk assessment framework to guide the resumption of activities and timely and sustained outreach to donors to mitigate financial challenges. Continued and, in some cases, enhanced service delivery during the period of lockdown demonstrated the Institute's increased capacity and resilience.

60. With regard to the Institute's fortieth anniversary celebrations in 2020, the Board noted the cancellation of a number of events and the transition to online formats for others. The Board also noted that the anniversary would be an important opportunity for the General Assembly to consider the work UNIDIR had accomplished and the impact it had had over four decades, and to explore ways to enhance the Institute's long-term sustainability. Board members committed to participating in events and appearing in short videos to promote the commemoration on social media and to contribute online comment or analysis.

61. The Board reflected on the significant impact the pandemic was expected to have on the Institute's operations and revenue, in particular a potential decline in revenue in 2021. The Board acknowledged the importance of enhancing resource mobilization efforts in 2020 vis-à-vis existing and new donors and of continuing to take steps to reduce expenditures. With regard to operating costs, the Board expressed concern with the introduction of rental charges for UNIDIR at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, which were expected to triple over the next five years. Considering the Institute's mandate and activities in support of Member States and the international disarmament machinery, and considering the Institute's cost structure, the Board recommended the continuation of the Institute's 40-year old rent-free accommodation arrangement at the Palais des Nations.

62. The Board noted, as it had before, that the Institute's subvention from the regular budget had remained relatively unchanged for more than a decade. The Board continues to believe that the Institute's reliance on voluntary funding remains a key challenge to the its autonomy, capacity to deliver independent research and financial sustainability. Therefore, the Board reiterated its long-standing recommendation that the Institute's subvention be increased in proportion to its contemporary requirements and in line with the recommendations the Secretary-General had given in July 2018 (see [A/73/284](#)). The Board considered an increase particularly important, particularly in the light of the expected decline in revenue as a consequence of the economic implications of the pandemic.

63. Looking forward, the Board endorsed the Institute's institutional priorities for 2020: strengthened policy impact, financial sustainability and global engagement. It encouraged the Institute to continue its efforts to engage relevant audiences beyond Geneva and acknowledged in that regard the Institute's intentions to hold regional events and to establish a liaison presence in New York on a pilot basis, subject to the availability of funding, to support outreach, partnerships and resource mobilization. Additional efforts by UNIDIR to engage the general public were recommended. The Board supported the Institute's ongoing initiatives to enhance diversity in research

expertise through, inter alia, arrangements with visiting researchers, non-resident fellows and paid graduate professionals. Finally, Board members reiterated that the Institute's fortieth anniversary was a moment to reflect on its achievements and to equip it with the funding basis necessary to maintain and further expand its scope and impact.

#### **IV. Future work and other matters**

64. The Board will continue the programme of work in 2021 and will build on the key points and the conceptual framework it identified in its discussions to date with a view to identifying elements for alternative approaches and a new vision for nuclear disarmament and arms control. The Board will present recommendations on these matters in the report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Advisory Board of Disarmament Matters to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session.

65. Going forward, it is recommended that experts, including outside experts, with wide-ranging expertise, geographical backgrounds and viewpoints be invited to brief the Board.

## Annex

### Members of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters 2020

Selma Ashipala-Musavyi (Chair)  
Ambassador  
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation of Namibia  
Windhoek

Leena Al-Hadid  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations and other international organisations in Vienna

Corentin Brustlein  
Director  
Security Studies Center  
Institut français des relations internationales  
Paris

Lucia Dammert  
Associate Professor  
Universidad de Santiago de Chile  
Santiago

Lewis A. Dunn  
Former United States Ambassador to the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons  
Virginia, United States of America

Amandeep Gill  
Director  
International Digital Health and Artificial Intelligence Research Collaborative  
Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies  
Geneva

Elissa Golberg  
Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy  
Global Affairs Canada  
Ottawa

Arminka Helic  
Member  
House of Lords of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
London

Marina Kaljurand  
Member of the European Parliament  
Brussels

Anton Khlopkov  
Director  
Center for Energy and Security Studies  
Moscow

Li Song  
Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs  
Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations  
Geneva

Marty Natalegawa  
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs for Indonesia  
Jakarta

Margot Wallström  
Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

Abiodun Williams  
Director of the Institute for Global Leadership and Professor of the Practice of  
International Politics, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University  
Medford, United States of America

Motaz Zahran  
Ambassador  
Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Cabinet Affairs  
Cairo

Renata Dwan (ex officio)  
Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research  
Geneva

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