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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

The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters is undertaking a two-year programme of work (2026–2027) on the theme “Confidence-building measures in international security and disarmament: rebuilding trust and enhancing transparency in a fragmented security landscape”. The present report covers the Board’s eighty-fifth and eighty-sixth sessions, held in Geneva in January 2026 and in New York in June 2026, respectively. As an interim report, it presents the Board’s initial findings and the focus areas that it has adopted to guide its remaining work, with a full set of recommendations to follow at the eighty-eighth session in June 2027.

Across both sessions, the Board mapped the drivers of fragmentation in the international security environment, surveyed the current landscape of transparency and confidence-building measures across traditional and emerging domains, and examined regional approaches to confidence-building. It gave particular attention, at the Secretary-General’s request, to reducing near-term risks while laying foundations for renewed progress on arms control and disarmament. The Board also advanced its survey of transparency and confidence-building measures across emerging technologies and domains, including artificial intelligence, information and communications technologies (ICTs), cyberspace and outer space, and examined regional approaches to such measures across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas.

Thus, the eighty-sixth session, against the background of deeply troubling trends in the international situation, was structured around five core focus areas to guide the Board’s near-term work and its 2027 recommendations. These are: reaffirming international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, as the normative foundation of international peace and security, and transparency and confidence-building measures as indispensable pillars for promoting international peace and security; taking measures to avoid escalation,

* A/81/150.



particularly relating to nuclear weapons; reversing the erosion of trust through dialogue and diplomacy; adopting a human-centred approach limiting civilian harm in conflict, including through protection of critical infrastructure; and affirming the centrality of the United Nations as the platform for multilateral engagement and deploying its technical expertise in support of efforts of Member States relating to transparency and confidence-building measures. These analyses will form the basis for the more detailed recommendations that the Board will develop at its January 2027 session.

In its capacity as the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), the Board reviewed the Institute's programmes, operations and finances. It welcomed the resilience of UNIDIR amid a challenging funding environment and noted a strengthened outlook driven by increased demand for its research and advisory services. The Board took note of the launch of new initiatives, including the Centre of Excellence on AI, Peace and Security and the Science and Technology Watchtower, as well as the continued implementation of projects such as the project on managing exits from armed conflict and the project on a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. It commended the Institute's expanding global engagement in developing regions and growing research networks and its role in convening major international conferences.

The Board also reviewed the financial situation of UNIDIR, noting ongoing efforts to diversify funding sources, maintain cost efficiencies and address uncertainties related to reductions in the regular budget subvention. It welcomed measures to strengthen institutional effectiveness, including improvements in geographical diversity and expertise, and was briefed on efforts under the UN80 Initiative to enhance the strategic integration of efforts and complementarity with the Office for Disarmament Affairs while preserving the Institute's research independence. The Board subsequently adopted the Institute's programme of work and budget estimates for 2027, reaffirming its support for the Institute's strategic framework 2026–2030 and core research priorities.

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held its eighty-fifth session in Geneva from 14 to 16 January 2026 and its eighty-sixth session at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 24 to 26 June. D. B. Venkatesh Varma (India) served as Chair of the Board for both sessions.
2. Throughout the sessions, Board members received briefings from experts representing a wide range of backgrounds, areas of expertise, ages and geographical regions, and reflecting a gender balance.¹
3. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [38/183](#) O. 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, and has been submitted in document [A/81/256](#).
4. For 2026–2027, the Secretary-General has tasked the Board with undertaking a strategic reflection on confidence-building measures in international security and disarmament, with a particular focus on rebuilding trust and enhancing transparency in a fragmented global security landscape.
5. As the Board is at the first stage of its two-year programme of work (2026–2027), the present report reflects initial findings and emerging considerations. More detailed recommendations will be developed over the course of subsequent sessions for submission to the Secretary-General.
6. The Board's work is aimed at:
 - Assessing the current landscape of transparency and confidence-building measures
 - Identifying gaps and challenges in the implementation of such measures
 - Exploring options for adapting existing measures
 - Formulating practical, forward-looking recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of existing measures and develop new ones
7. In pursuing this work, the Board will consider the applicability and implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures in a range of disarmament and international security areas, including new technologies.

¹ Briefings were given by: Mely Caballero-Anthony (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), on transparency and confidence-building measures in the current geopolitical environment; Jacek Bylica (International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)), on IAEA perspectives on nuclear power plant facilities in conflict zones; Alex Lampalzer (Office for Disarmament Affairs), on the role of confidence-building measures under the Biological Weapons Convention; Ivan Marques (Organization of American States), on transparency and confidence-building measures: American hemisphere perspectives and priorities; Peter Martinez (Secure World Foundation), on transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space activities; Ioana Puscas (UNIDIR), on confidence-building measures for artificial intelligence; Michael Spies (Office for Disarmament Affairs), giving an overview of transparency and confidence-building measures in disarmament; Rachel Stohl (Stimson Center), on transparency and confidence-building measures and conventional arms control.

II. Substantive discussions

A. Context

8. The Board welcomed the opportunity to reflect in a sustained manner on transparency and confidence-building measures in international security and disarmament, with a view to offering concrete, forward-looking recommendations. As underscored in the Secretary-General's policy brief entitled "A New Agenda for Peace", confidence-building and crisis-management mechanisms that have long helped forestall direct confrontations have "deteriorated in the past decade and have not kept pace with the shifting geopolitical environment". In his report entitled "The security we need: rebalancing military spending for a sustainable and peaceful future", the Secretary-General further underscored the importance of regional and global confidence-building measures and of promoting transparency and dialogue as essential tools for diplomacy, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

9. Against this backdrop, the Board considered that its mandate – to identify practical measures to preserve, adapt, strengthen and expand transparency and confidence-building measures – was both timely and necessary. Members emphasized that current pressures on the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and conflicts arising from the erosion of the rules-based international order, combined with the erosion of certain agreements and frameworks on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament, underscore the need for renewed and sustained attention to transparency and confidence-building. The Board observed that the fragmentation in the international security environment reflects a profound shift, characterized by increasing violations of international law, growing contestation of the norms and institutions that have traditionally sustained cooperation, and a weakening of multilateralism. Members noted that rules and norms are increasingly perceived, by some, as constraints to be discarded rather than shared guarantees to be upheld, contributing to heightened mistrust between States.

10. The Board observed that these dynamics are further compounded by structural factors, including a disregard for the legitimate security concerns of the vast majority of Member States and for restraints on the use of force, rising militarization and military expenditures, the deliberate use of disinformation to distort public narratives, and a chronic deficit of dialogue and trust. These are mutually reinforcing dynamics that both shape and are shaped by the complex geopolitical environment and that erode the foundations on which confidence-building rests.

11. In this context, the contemporary security environment is characterized by tightly coupled global systems. This complexity creates the conditions for multiple systemic crises, where triggering events such as regional conflicts generate global cascading impacts – for example, on food security, energy and supply chains – that disproportionately affect the most vulnerable States. Members also underlined the ecological and climate crisis as a major source of instability as well as a threat multiplier, exacerbating instability and increasing the risk of conflict in ways that themselves require enhanced cooperation, transparency and confidence-building among States.

12. At the same time, the Board identified grounds for cautious optimism. Despite growing strain, many core disarmament treaties and regimes have shown resilience and continue to fulfil their functions, and many established mechanisms and practices, such as crisis communication channels and launch notification arrangements, continue to reduce shared risks of miscalculation and produce a degree of strategic predictability. Members also emphasized that the long-standing commitment to restraining the use of force remains a foundational pillar of the international

community and enjoys the support of the vast majority of Member States, which continue to value multilateralism and the resolution of disputes through dialogue and diplomacy, in which transparency and confidence-building measures can play a significant facilitating role.

13. Against this backdrop, the Board's work across both sessions was structured around four interrelated objectives: taking stock of the current landscape of transparency and confidence-building measures; identifying key gaps, particularly in relation to emerging technologies and evolving forms of conflict; assessing how transparency and confidence-building measures must adapt to remain effective in conditions of fragmentation and low trust; and addressing near-term risks. The analysis presented in the present report synthesizes the Board's deliberations with regard to these four dimensions, which together frame its emerging findings, as set out in paragraph 15.

14. The Board received a series of expert briefings and food-for-thought presentations² during its eighty-fifth and eighty-sixth sessions, which informed its deliberations and are summarized in annex I. Moreover, the Board received remarks from the Secretary-General, delivered by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu. The High Representative also briefed the Board in her own capacity at both sessions, offering additional substantive guidance for the deliberations.

15. In response to the Secretary-General's call to focus its near-term attention on what is actionable and urgent, the Board identified five core focus areas to guide its near-term work and its 2027 recommendations: (a) reaffirm international law, including the Charter and international humanitarian law, as the normative foundation of international peace and security, and transparency and confidence-building measures as indispensable pillars for promoting international peace and security; (b) avoid escalation, particularly with respect to nuclear weapons, through measures that strengthen restraint, enhance communication and reduce the risk of miscalculation; (c) reverse the erosion of trust among States through revitalized dialogue and diplomacy; (d) adopt a human-centred approach to limit civilian casualties in conflict, including by strengthening protections for critical infrastructure; (e) affirm the centrality of the United Nations as the primary platform for multilateral engagement and deploy its technical expertise to support Member States in implementing practical confidence-building measures.

B. Transparency and confidence-building measures: roles and challenges

16. The Board first examined the conceptual foundations and historical evolution of transparency and confidence-building measures. It underscored that such measures remain indispensable tools for reducing ambiguity, preventing miscalculation, developing common understandings and sustaining dialogue, and that their importance only grows as tensions rise. Across thematic areas, including nuclear, biological, chemical and conventional weapons, cyberspace and outer space, existing

² The Board members heard and delivered presentations on transparency and confidence-building measures and weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear and biological weapons, as well as risks associated with nuclear power plant facilities in conflict zones; conventional arms control; new and emerging technologies; and outer space. In addition, briefings addressed regional perspectives from Africa, the American hemisphere, Europe, North-East Asia and the Middle East, alongside cross-cutting perspectives on transparency and confidence-building measures and international law, as well as human-centred, innovative and conceptual approaches to such measures. Details of the focused presentations are included in the annex.

transparency and confidence-building measures continue to provide important mechanisms for transparency, communication and risk reduction, many of which should be preserved and promoted by all States.

17. At the same time, the Board's analysis pointed to a widening gap between existing transparency and confidence-building measures and the realities of the contemporary security environment. The effectiveness of such measures varies significantly across regions and thematic areas, with declining participation and uneven implementation affecting several established measures. In particular, increasingly complex security risks are posing challenges to existing measures and raising questions with regard to potential new ones.

Taking stock of the current landscape of transparency and confidence-building measures

18. The Board described an increasingly complex conflict landscape: challenges to strategic stability are rising, and proliferation risks are accelerating; and prolonged conventional wars and neglected regional conflicts coexist with structural pressures from economic disruption, migration and transnational crime. The conduct of warfare continues to evolve, significantly impacted by rapid technological innovation, including in areas such as artificial intelligence, ICTs, missiles and uncrewed aerial vehicles, thereby intensifying challenges to international law in relation to sovereignty, civilian protection and the conduct of hostilities.

19. Members also noted the progressive erosion of respect for international law, including the foundational principles of sovereignty and the peaceful settlement of disputes, as well as the protection of civilians under international humanitarian law. The Board reaffirmed that existing international law should underpin confidence-building efforts, with several members underscoring that the principal challenges lie not in the adequacy of the legal framework itself, but in a lack of effective implementation, enforcement and compliance. The Board also noted that the scale and interdependence of contemporary challenges may exceed the current capacity – and, in some cases, the willingness and political will – of States to negotiate effective responses.

20. Against this backdrop, the Board examined how transparency and confidence-building measures have succeeded and been challenged across different thematic areas and political contexts. It found that measures tend to lose Member State participation when left as stand-alone instruments rather than embedded in broader frameworks,³ but also, conversely, become weak when the international agreements to which they are linked are themselves abrogated. It also concluded that existing multilateral mechanisms may be insufficiently equipped to address the systemic and cross-domain nature of emerging risks, particularly in a context of deep mistrust among States.

21. On this basis, the Board identified several cross-cutting lessons. First, reaffirming and ensuring compliance with international law itself is fundamental to fostering trust and cooperation between States, including confidence-building. Second, transparency and confidence-building measures can be particularly effective when embedded in broader political and institutional processes, underpinned by sustained engagement. Where such conditions are absent, implementation becomes

³ The examples discussed included the fluctuating participation rates in the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures and the ways in which other transparency instruments have maintained relevance through cooperative arrangements. The Register of Conventional Arms, for example, has retained value through cooperation and reporting synergies with related instruments, including the Arms Trade Treaty.

uneven and measures lose relevance. Third, regular reporting, robust institutional support and capacity-building keep such mechanisms accessible and meaningful for all States, including as practical measures for cases where transparency alone does not generate confidence. Fourth, the existing set of transparency and confidence-building measures would benefit from periodic review, and digital tools, including translation, analytics and data-sharing platforms, could enhance participation and utility, particularly for States with more limited technical capacity. Fifth, track 2 and track 1.5 dialogues are important complements to formal processes, alongside broader engagement with civil society, academia and, where appropriate, the private sector, whose expertise and perspectives can usefully inform the design and implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures. Sixth, in assessing how such measures could adapt to conditions of fragmentation and low trust, the Board emphasized that, in such environments, progress may depend on incremental, practical measures that can function even in the absence of broader political agreement. Informal arrangements, technical cooperation and issue-specific mechanisms were identified as particularly valuable in maintaining communication and reducing risk. Seventh, the Board further underlined that disinformation, by distorting intent and eroding public trust, poses a direct threat to transparency and confidence-building measures and that confidence-building frameworks should explicitly address this risk. Eighth, these measures must adapt to the realities of conflict contexts. In situations of active or recent conflict, they must be sequenced and tailored to successive stages of a conflict cycle, from escalation avoidance to ceasefire, stabilization and peace negotiations, with distinct and context-appropriate measures at each phase. At each phase, tailored transparency and confidence-building measures can play a vital role based on the consent and active participation of all parties to each individual conflict.

22. Lastly, the Board drew the lesson that long-standing assumptions regarding transparency require reassessment. Reflecting on earlier periods of development of transparency and confidence-building measures, it observed that transparency and openness were historically seen as effective safeguards. In today's highly interconnected and information-rich environment, however, transparency alone is no longer a sufficient mechanism of accountability. The Board therefore called for a fresh examination of underlying assumptions and advocated for consideration to be given to new typologies of confidence-building measures, taking into account the fact that contemporary conflicts are increasingly shaped by contested perceptions, narratives and information.

23. Drawing on these lessons, the Board highlighted a number of areas where these lessons have direct implications: considering the application of transparency and confidence-building measures in new thematic areas, including emerging technologies; revitalizing conventional arms transparency and confidence-building instruments where norms are being eroded; and advancing nuclear risk reduction through practical arrangements.

Addressing near-term risks

24. The cross-cutting lessons identified by the Board find their most immediate and urgent application in the nuclear domain. In line with the Secretary-General's request, the Board focused its attention on near-term risks, in particular the growing risk of miscalculation and the lowering of nuclear thresholds, which exacerbate the risks of use of nuclear weapons. The Board concurred with the urgency of these risks, emphasizing that its work must prioritize concrete, implementable measures and processes capable of reducing tensions and preventing escalation in the immediate term.

25. The Board observed that heightened rhetoric, intensifying strategic competition and repeated instances of brinkmanship have increased the risk of miscalculation to a degree not seen since the Cold War. In this context, it underscored the urgency of prioritizing near-term nuclear risk reduction measures, noting that preserving existing nuclear confidence-building measures constitutes a minimum requirement, while adapting and strengthening them is necessary to reflect current geopolitical realities. Effective, up-to-date nuclear transparency and confidence-building measures were thus seen as critical to reducing misperception, preventing escalation and maintaining strategic stability at a time when established guardrails are under strain and trust among nuclear-weapon States is in need of strengthening and revitalization.

26. The Board believed that progress on concrete, near-term nuclear risk reduction measures – even modest, informal or incremental steps with the broadest possible participation of nuclear-weapon States – can serve a dual function: preserving existing guardrails while also building the habits and relationships that lay the foundation for more ambitious longer-term arms control and disarmament efforts. Sustained engagement with non-nuclear-weapon States was identified as important for reinforcing trust and preserving the integrity of the broader non-proliferation regime.

27. In its deliberations on nuclear transparency and confidence-building measures, the Board drew on a framework distinguishing between measures that build trust (often requiring sustained political investment) and those that build confidence (which can function even in low-trust environments), and between formal treaty-based and political arrangements and informal practical measures. This framing clarified the core objectives of nuclear transparency and confidence-building measures: reducing the risks of miscalculation and misperception, promoting predictability and transparency, building habits and norms of behaviour among relevant actors, and laying the groundwork for future arms control and disarmament efforts. On this basis, the Board highlighted three broad approaches warranting further development: enhanced transparency measures; crisis communications measures, including the expansion of crisis-proof communication lines; and measures centred on the human factor and bridge-building between practitioners and decision-makers. In this connection, the Board noted that the matter of human decision-making was particularly important in light of the potential dangers arising from the possible nexus between artificial intelligence and nuclear weapons.

Transparency and confidence-building measures under conditions of fragmentation and low trust

28. Members identified risk reduction, predictability, crisis prevention and crisis communication as the priority areas for further work, alongside the need for more systematic mapping of vulnerabilities, including breakdowns in arms control frameworks and potential escalation pathways. In light of these constraints, the Board emphasized the importance of pragmatic, flexible approaches capable of advancing cooperation even in the absence of formal political agreement, including informal and technical initiatives to rebuild trust and confidence, with the assistance, where appropriate, of track 2 discussions, with contributions from experts and civil society. Such approaches were assessed as offering more feasible pathways for dialogue in low-trust and high-conflict environments.

Identifying gaps and emerging challenges

29. The Board further observed that realizing the opportunities of emerging technologies while managing their risks is one of the defining challenges of the present moment. The rapid military application of advancing technologies,

particularly artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities and autonomous systems – across their full life cycle, from design to deployment – in the absence of adequate guardrails poses acute and novel risks of miscalculation and escalation. Rapidly advancing technologies have the potential to increase the speed and complexity of decision-making, introduce new risks of misperception and escalation, and challenge traditional approaches to transparency, verification and accountability, including export controls, and they are deeply embedded in civilian contexts through ubiquitous use. Consequently, traditional arms control approaches may be insufficient.

30. In response, the Board highlighted the need for more flexible and adaptive modalities that treat emerging technologies as components of broader sociotechnical systems rather than as discrete weapons systems. Practical measures could draw from traditional transparency and confidence-building measures, including voluntary transparency declarations, incident notification arrangements, communication channels to prevent escalation, and the development of common terminology and shared technical understandings. It was acknowledged that transparency and confidence-building measures in the area of emerging technologies are likely to remain incremental and non-binding in the near term, and should be designed as complements to, rather than replacements for, existing frameworks.

31. In this context, the Board reflected that artificial intelligence governance efforts are proliferating across multiple non-United Nations tracks in ways that generate risks of fragmentation and inconsistency as well as opportunities for coordination, consolidation and expansion. With regard to addressing the military applications of artificial intelligence in particular, the Board considered that the United Nations has a distinctive convening role in ensuring that related transparency and confidence-building measures are developed within a universal, inclusive framework, while bearing in mind the ongoing complementary value of multilateral, plurilateral, regional and bilateral initiatives and other State initiatives.

32. In examining transparency and confidence-building measures for military applications of artificial intelligence, the Board identified a range of practical challenges: determining the precise scope of such measures (whether they should target safety risks, security risks or both); establishing which actors they apply to; and specifying the outcomes that they should be aimed at preventing. The Board considered that an emerging toolbox of artificial intelligence-specific transparency and confidence-building measures could include information-sharing measures, common standards for testing and evaluation, structured confidence-building dialogues, and capacity-building efforts for States with more limited technical capabilities.

33. The Board also examined the intersection of emerging technologies with other weapons systems, including nuclear weapons, noting that their rapid development and deployment are fundamentally altering the security environment in ways that existing frameworks for transparency and confidence-building measures were not designed to address. This intersection was identified as an area requiring urgent attention.

34. The Board further identified gaps in addressing non-traditional drivers of insecurity, including the role of non-State actors, transnational organized crime, terrorist groups and hybrid forms of conflict. Existing transparency and confidence-building measures, which are largely designed for State-centric interactions, are not always well adapted to these dynamics. Given industry's central role in technological innovation, members emphasized the need to develop more effective mechanisms for building trust between States and private actors, incentivizing their participation in the development of transparency and confidence-building measures, and integrating their technical expertise into the design and implementation of such measures in emerging domains.

35. The Board also flagged persistent structural obstacles, most notably the wide technical disparities among States that risk creating a two-tiered architecture with regard to transparency and confidence-building measures, insofar as States with lower capacities may not be in a position to implement certain measures. Capacity-building to bridge this gap was thus identified as an integral element of any effective framework. Several members underscored that transparency and confidence-building measures for artificial intelligence cannot be conceived in isolation because of the ubiquitous nature of artificial intelligence architectures; they must address the application of artificial intelligence across military dimensions and be sensitive to regional differences in technical capacity and strategic context. The Board further noted the need to consider the broader sociotechnical systems within which artificial intelligence operates, given that failures or disruptions in these systems may create cascading effects that increase or compound risks associated with weapons.

A human-centred approach to transparency and confidence-building measures

36. The Board considered that the need for a human-centred approach to confidence-building should be front and centre. The Board underscored that the effectiveness of transparency and confidence-building measures depends not only on State-to-State arrangements, but also on the broader social and political environments in which they operate. It agreed that a human-centred perspective is not an optional addendum to the design of such measures but a precondition for effectiveness in many contexts. Trust deficits in today's security environment are not confined to relations between States; thus, transparency and confidence-building measures should be sensitive to the needs of the communities most affected by armed conflict.

37. Public perceptions, societal trust and the engagement of civil society shape the political incentives and accountability mechanisms that ultimately determine whether transparency and confidence-building measures hold under pressure. Measures that prioritize the protection of civilians, reduce human harm and strengthen accountability are more likely to endure and command public trust. Engagement with civil society, academia and other stakeholders can further reinforce transparency and support implementation.

Regionally tailored and context-specific approaches

38. The Board emphasized that there is no universal template for confidence-building, as regions differ significantly in their security dynamics and threat perceptions, and levels of institutional capacities differ significantly across regions and subregions. As such, context-specific approaches are required in order to ensure both relevance and effectiveness, drawing on existing frameworks, local expertise and subregional political dynamics. Long-standing transparency and confidence-building measures, such as the 1988 Agreement between India and Pakistan on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities, illustrate the importance of context-specific arrangements.

39. Regional perspectives further illustrated these dynamics. In Europe, the Board's discussions highlighted a fundamental shift in a security order that had long been grounded in transparency and confidence-building measures, driven by ongoing conflict, a loss of confidence in traditional partnerships and accelerating military build-ups across the continent and globally. In Africa and Latin America, transparency and confidence-building measures relating to small arms and light weapons were identified as a priority, given the sustained harm that these weapons inflict on civilian populations, particularly through their use by non-State actors. Regional institutions and civil society organizations are increasingly integrating transparency and

confidence-building measures into coordinated political and operational responses to this challenge.

40. Regarding the African context specifically, the Board noted the success of subregional transparency and confidence-building measures in addressing security challenges associated with small arms and light weapons, as well as improvised explosive devices employed by non-State actors against civilian populations, including through the use of amnesty programmes. Members discussed the African Union's aspiration to play a more prominent role in disarmament efforts and welcomed initiatives aimed at building the next generation of African disarmament practitioners and diplomats. The Treaty of Pelindaba, which established a nuclear-weapon-free zone across Africa, was recognized as an important regional achievement. At the same time, members noted the interest of a number of African States in developing civilian nuclear energy programmes and emphasized the importance of facilitating equitable access to relevant technologies and expertise in support of these objectives.

41. Drawing on experiences from Latin America and the Caribbean, members highlighted the importance of developing transparency and confidence-building measures that are practical and responsive to States' differing capacities, while strengthening cooperation among Governments, regional organizations and civil society to improve data collection, tracing and implementation. In this regard, the region's long-standing experience with confidence-building and cooperative security arrangements, including through the Treaty of Tlatelolco, provides a useful foundation for dialogue, transparency and regional trust. Members also discussed the value of incorporating the perspectives of affected populations and improving data on the gender and socioeconomic dimensions of armed violence. Broad stakeholder engagement was seen as enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of transparency and confidence-building measures, while sustained political commitment and State ownership remained essential. Members also noted that transnational organized crime, including arms trafficking and other cross-border threats, can undermine trust among States and complicate regional security cooperation, requiring confidence-building measures to adapt to evolving security challenges, including those involving non-State actors, while ensuring broad participation, regional ownership and institutional support.

42. The Board also spent time examining regional approaches to transparency and confidence-building measures, with a focus on North-East Asia and the Middle East. Here, the Board observed a growing mismatch between conventional frameworks for such measures and the evolving strategic environment, including a significant rise in global military spending. On the Korean Peninsula, they noted that existing confidence-building measures have been progressively undermined and called for better alignment between denuclearization objectives and near-term risk reduction. On the Middle East, the Board discussed past efforts with regard to transparency and confidence-building measures in the region and their limited success and called for the development of new confidence-building measures, missile control measures and subregional approaches tailored to the specific but fast-evolving dynamics of the region.

43. In this regard, the Board noted that, in some contexts, formal institutionalized mechanisms can support transparency and predictability, while in others, incremental approaches, such as expert dialogues, informal exchanges and the development of shared technical understandings, for example, by academics and civil society and in the context of military-to-military contact, may provide more viable pathways for progress. Regional and subregional frameworks, where present, can serve as

important entry points for confidence-building, while more flexible arrangements may be necessary in contexts of heightened political sensitivity or limited trust.

44. The Board highlighted the potential for comparative analysis and cross-regional learning as a means of identifying transferable lessons and adapting successful practices. Capacity-building to address disparities in technical and institutional capacity was identified as essential to enabling broader participation in regional processes relating to transparency and confidence-building measures. The Board also noted the value of deeper conceptual work on how “trust” and “confidence” operate differently across regional contexts, including the relationship between strategic uncertainty, mistrust among States, and the weakening of existing disarmament and arms control regimes. The Board called for sustained dialogue on reducing global nuclear risks, reinforcing the global norm against nuclear testing and preventing attacks on nuclear facilities. Data collection, including on victims, is essential for understanding the impact of weapons and informing evidence-based policies. Victim-related data can strengthen transparency, improve risk assessments and support more effective measures to reduce harm and enhance security.

45. Taken together, human-centred and regionally tailored approaches were seen as mutually reinforcing. By grounding transparency and confidence-building measures in both the needs of affected populations and the realities of specific security environments, such approaches can contribute to rebuilding trust and advancing practical cooperation in a fragmented global security landscape.

C. Future work

46. Across all areas of its work – nuclear risk reduction, emerging technologies, human-centred approaches and regional dynamics – the Board’s analysis points to a common conclusion: many of the conditions that sustain transparency and confidence-building measures are under increasing strain, even as the need for them becomes more urgent. The five core focus areas adopted at the eighty-sixth session reflect the Board’s initial assessment of where action is both most necessary and most feasible. While not yet constituting a final set of recommendations, they provide a clear direction for the Board’s ongoing work: anchored in international law, focused on reducing near-term risks, responsive to evolving technological and geopolitical realities, and grounded in the central role of the United Nations as a platform for rebuilding trust and promoting cooperative security.

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

47. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, acting in its capacity as the Board of Trustees of UNIDIR, met twice in 2026 (13 January and 23 June) to review the Institute’s operations, funding and programmes.

Achievements in 2025 and 2026: results and impact

48. At the two meetings, trustees were briefed on how the Institute had withstood financial volatility in the international sector in 2025 before defying the wider trend of declining funding, owing to a surge in demand for its work in 2026. This enabled the launch of major initiatives such as the Centre of Excellence on AI, Peace and Security and the Science and Technology Watchtower, as well as ensuring the continuation of the projects of the Institute on managing exits from armed conflict and the Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction. At the meeting in June,

trustees were also informed of various multi-year agreements that were nearing conclusion.

49. Trustees noted that those successes would help to consolidate the Institute's strategic framework for the period 2026–2030, launched in late 2025 alongside a well-attended, high-level event commemorating the forty-fifth anniversary of UNIDIR. Trustees commended the Institute for securing its place in a difficult global environment.

50. Throughout 2025 and to date in 2026, the Institute responded to growing demand for varied research-based training and briefings, particularly from developing countries. Courses were offered in West Africa, South-East Asia, the Western Balkans and Mongolia, while quarterly briefings to all United Nations regional groups promoted the uptake of UNIDIR research and recommendations across the international community.

51. The Board appreciated the global reach of the Institute's research networks and digital tools, including a novel space security research fellowship equipping young people from around the world with vital knowledge, skills and networks.

52. Trustees acknowledged the convening power of flagship events such as the Innovations Dialogue, the Outer Space Security Conference, the Cyber Stability Conference and the Global Conference on AI, Security and Ethics. They also commended efforts to reach the widest possible range of stakeholders, including through an interfaith dialogue on the ethics of military artificial intelligence, and media training designed to improve coverage of disarmament issues. A doubling in event attendance levels demonstrated the Institute's continued impact on international security dialogue and negotiations.

53. The Director briefed the Board on research-based advisory support to national, regional and international partners and to disarmament, peace and security processes. Recent initiatives of the New York liaison office, including engagement with the Security Council and private or philanthropic actors, were noted with interest.

54. The Board observed that the Institute had consolidated its positive role through increased access to high-level decision makers, the promotion of geographically balanced participation and the provision of cross-domain insights. Involvement in the Munich Security Conference, the Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain summit, the Paris Peace Forum, the Moscow Non-proliferation Conference, the Global Cybersecurity Forum in Riyadh, the eleventh Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security and the World Peace Forum in Beijing stood out in that regard.

55. Senior researchers briefed the Board on key topics such as the new Centre of Excellence on AI, Peace and Security, whose integration into the Institute was warmly welcomed; the rise of agentic artificial intelligence; arms control and disarmament before and after the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; an unprecedented assessment of the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa; strengthening the women and peace and security agenda through arms control; and continued support for a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction.

Financial and human resources

56. At the meeting in January, the Director informed the Board of a drop in revenue from \$14.3 million in 2024 to \$12.5 million in 2025, along with a net reduction of two donors (for a total of 44). The decrease was mainly the result of greater caution

among States due to geopolitical instability. The initiative most affected was the Biological Weapons Convention national implementation measures database, which was required to return almost \$1.4 million to the original donor. Trustees noted with appreciation, however, that UNIDIR had maintained the trust of all five permanent members of the Security Council and had received contributions from all United Nations regional groups. Trustees observed that widespread recognition of the quality of the Institute's work meant that the revenue outlook for 2026 and 2027 had improved even in adverse conditions. Owing to extensive resource mobilization efforts, new State donors (Austria and Mongolia), non-State donors such as the City and Canton of Geneva and various non-governmental organizations have made voluntary contributions since 2025. By the middle of 2026, UNIDIR had received contributions worth \$13.2 million from 36 donors, as compared with \$7.8 million from 21 donors in 2025.

57. Although income was lower in 2025 than in 2024, expenditures remained at a similar level (\$13.6 million versus \$13.5 million). This was made possible by the carry-over of funds from previous years in line with donor agreements. With increased activity in 2026, as well as rising staff and non-staff costs, expenditures in 2026 are projected at \$14.5 million. As an organization supported by voluntary funding and committed to the principles of lean efficiency, UNIDIR has long focused on achieving cost efficiencies. However, given financial tightening across the international sector and the imperatives of the UN80 Initiative, the Institute has also relocated some staff to less costly duty stations, resulting in an annual saving of over \$100,000.

58. With regard to the Institute's regular budget subvention, the Director informed trustees in January that the budgeted amount (\$786,500) had been received in full by late 2025. For 2026, the revised programme budget includes a 20 per cent cut in that subvention, meaning that it will no longer cover even the salaries of the Director and the Executive Officer. Prior to the funding crisis of early 2025 and the launch of the UN80 Initiative, the Institute had welcomed the call by the General Assembly, in its resolution [79/73](#), for an assessment of the Institute's financial needs, potentially leading to a modification of the level of the subvention. That assessment, carried out by the Office for Disarmament Affairs in January 2025, identified a need to support the "irreducible core" of UNIDIR (see [A/70/186](#)) by expanding the subvention to cover five additional posts: one of Deputy Director, three of Head of Programmes and one of Head of Communications and Partnerships. In view of the 2026 budget cuts and the need to limit budgets in the near term, the Director suggested, and the trustees agreed, that 2026 might not represent the most opportune moment to request a subvention increase worth \$1.3 million and that the Director should monitor the situation both within and beyond the United Nations in order to identify the best possible opportunity to obtain approval for the proposed budget increase. The Board advised, however, that it would be crucial for the positive result of the Secretary-General's assessment to be mentioned in upcoming reporting by oversight bodies so that the proposed subvention increase might be revisited more easily at a later date.

59. The Director noted that staff numbers had risen from 71 in 2024 to 77 in 2025 and to 81 by mid-2026. Trustees appreciated efforts to address any geographical imbalance in staff composition, noting that the share of non-European staff had risen from 53 per cent in 2024 to 59 per cent in 2026. Given the delicate financial situation of the international sector, uncertainty around the proposed increase in the Institute's regular budget subvention and the evolving implications of the UN80 Initiative reforms, UNIDIR will continue to save costs by leaving the Deputy Director post vacant. In the interim, a temporary P-3 post has been added to support the Director with outreach planning and internal coordination. The functions of the P-4 New York Liaison Officer position created in 2021 (and vacant since mid-2023) are similarly

covered in 2026 by a temporary P-3 officer working in conjunction with the Head of the Institute's Security and Technology Programme, also based in New York.

60. The credibility and impact of the work of UNIDIR depend on its ability to attract and retain diverse, high-quality expertise. That ability had been weakened by austerity measures that precluded the customary provision of salary increases to researchers. However, a recent rise in voluntary funding stemming from greater demand for the Institute's work has enabled performance-based raises and career progressions in individual cases and a salary increase of 5 per cent for all staff on international individual contractor agreements.

61. The review of the administrative practices of UNIDIR was strongly supported by the positive report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, shared with trustees, as usual, ahead of the meeting. Trustees reaffirmed that the roles of the Board and the Director were in line with articles III (2) and IV (2) of the statute of UNIDIR and emphasized the need for flexibility in budget formulation, given the volatility of the funding environment and the associated levels of unpredictability over the course of any given year.

Briefing on the UN80 Initiative, in particular work package 23

62. The High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Director of UNIDIR delivered a joint briefing under the agenda item on the UN80 Initiative, focusing on work package 23. They recalled the proposal of the Secretary-General, set out in his progress report of September 2025, whereby "UNIDIR ... would be consolidated into the Office for Disarmament Affairs ... to strengthen focus and reduce fragmentation. In all cases, research independence will be fully respected" (A/80/392, para. 90). In the briefing, they updated the Board on the work of the joint task force of the Office for Disarmament Affairs and UNIDIR, formed in January 2026 to prepare recommendations to the Secretary-General. They emphasized that that work responded to the direction of the Secretary-General while safeguarding the distinct mandates and identities of both entities.

63. In the briefing, they outlined forward-looking recommendations for strengthening the United Nations disarmament ecosystem through more strategic collaboration between the Office for Disarmament Affairs and UNIDIR, which would be structured around three pillars: improved alignment between research and policy through coordinated planning and programming; greater efficiency in operational support; and strengthened external communications. Finally, they presented an implementation road map, starting with coordination mechanisms in the short term and followed by pilot initiatives and more synchronized planning in 2026 and 2027, progressing towards a more integrated model from 2028 onward. They further noted that the proposed framework could be implemented within existing mandates and governance arrangements, including the statute of UNIDIR, and requested that the Board provide guidance on the proposed recommendations to inform a report to the UN80 Initiative secretariat. Trustees recalled their January discussion, at which they had welcomed greater alignment while stressing the need to maintain the autonomy enshrined in article I of the statute of UNIDIR. In that regard, trustees discussed the importance of carefully managing potential risks and ensuring that implementation remained consistent with the governance arrangements and institutional independence of UNIDIR. Given the current situation of the United Nations and the importance of disarmament for Member States, the Board endorsed those recommendations as a practical and feasible way forward.

Programme of work and budget for 2027

64. The Director then briefed trustees on the continuous delivery of high-quality research under the strategic framework of UNIDIR for the period 2026–2030, which is anchored in three areas of excellence: strengthening arms control and disarmament; preventing conflict to build brighter futures; and advancing the governance of emerging technologies. The Institute’s core research programmes will continue to deliver on its mandate: security and technology, conventional weapons, space security, weapons of mass destruction, and integrated approaches. The project on managing exits from armed conflicts and – pending final approval – the project on a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction will continue in 2027. Trustees endorsed the potential expansion of the project on managing exits from armed conflict into a more sustainable programme in 2028, with coverage of conflict prevention and resilience reflecting the Institute’s international security research mandate.

65. Trustees noted that UNIDIR had begun its annual budgeting process for 2027, ultimately leading to granular cost plans. On the basis of the endorsement by the Board, the Institute will again work on the basis of two budgets: a conservative baseline budget, set at \$15 million, and an optimal delivery budget, set at \$18.5 million. Updated budget figures will be presented at the meeting in January 2027.

66. During the June 2026 session, the Board considered, approved and adopted the proposed programme of work and budget estimates of UNIDIR for 2027 ([A/81/256](#)), taking into account the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the draft of the report of the Director to the General Assembly.

IV. Future work and other matters

67. The Board will continue its deliberations at its eighty-seventh session, to be held from 13 to 15 January 2027 at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

68. The Board’s final report, containing its concrete recommendations to the Secretary-General, will be produced at the eighty-eighth session in June 2027 and transmitted to the General Assembly.

Annex I

Expert briefings and presentations to the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters

1. The Board received a series of expert briefings and food-for-thought presentations during its eighty-fifth and eighty-sixth sessions. Those inputs informed its deliberations. The summaries below reflect the content of the presentations.

A. Historical and cross-cutting perspectives

2. Michael Spies, of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, provided a comprehensive overview of transparency and confidence-building measures in the context of disarmament, tracing their conceptual foundations and historical evolution. He underlined the renewed relevance of such measures in addressing risks posed by emerging technologies, including in the domains of outer space, ballistic missiles and ICT security.

3. In his food-for-thought presentation, member of the Board, Nicholas Ritchie, called for a fundamental reimagining of the framework for transparency and confidence-building measures. He argued that contemporary security risks no longer arose primarily from discrete weapons but from complex, interconnected sociotechnical systems, and that the field therefore required constellations of complementary measures rather than isolated instruments. Understanding the distinct forms of harm that emerging technologies produced – which differ in kind, not just degree, from those of conventional weapons – was a prerequisite for designing effective responses. He pointed to existing frameworks from adjacent domains, including incident-prevention mechanisms and crisis communication channels, as useful points of departure, and noted that meaningful progress had already been made in developing shared understandings and common terminology in several areas.

B. Weapons of mass destruction

4. The Board was also briefed by Alex Lampalzer and Daniel Feakes, of the Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit. They outlined the transparency and confidence-building measures established within the framework of the Convention, reflected on their evolution and drew out transferable lessons for such measures across other disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation fields. The lessons included effective practices such as tailored assistance and the integration of confidence-building measures into broader implementation efforts.

5. Jacek Bylica, representing the International Atomic Energy Agency, briefed the Board on the risks posed by nuclear facilities situated in or near conflict zones. He underscored that protecting such infrastructure from attack was an urgent humanitarian and security concern with direct implications for nuclear safety norms and for confidence among States, and he stressed the need to uphold the existing legal framework to guard against attacks on nuclear facilities.

C. Emerging technologies

6. Ioana Puscas, of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, briefed the Board on confidence-building measures for military applications of artificial intelligence, drawing on lessons from ICT security, space security and biological

security and on State surveys on the impact and political viability of transparency and confidence-building measures in that area. She outlined transparency and cooperation measures, stressing their relevance for managing risks related to artificial intelligence while balancing national security concerns.

7. Member of the Board, Thompson Chengeta, in his presentation, drew on findings from the Global Commission on Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain. Building on the cross-cutting finding of the Board that reaffirming international law was the most immediate confidence-building measure available, he stressed its particular importance in the domain of artificial intelligence: compliance signalled trustworthiness and provided the normative foundation that made all other such measures credible. He cautioned that trust lost on fundamental legal matters could not be restored through minor technical gestures. On the specific question of whether new legal instruments were needed for artificial intelligence and cyberspace, he noted that most States favoured new agreements to fill gaps, while others considered existing law sufficient if properly applied – a debate that the Board will continue to monitor.

8. Peter Martinez, representing the Secure World Foundation, briefed the Board on transparency and confidence-building measures for outer space activities. He highlighted the increasingly congested and contested nature of the space environment and the growing role of commercial actors, calling for practical, behaviour-oriented measures, including pre-launch notifications, transparency on satellite manoeuvres and consultative mechanisms to reduce the risk of incidents and miscalculation in space.

D. Conventional arms and regional security

9. Rachel Stohl, representing the Stimson Center, briefed the Board on transparency and confidence-building measures and conventional arms control. She noted that transparency norms in the conventional arms domain were under global pressure, with some States withdrawing from reporting mechanisms. She called for measures adapted to new technologies in that domain and underscored the importance of inclusive participation, including on small arms and light weapons, which cause the vast majority of conflict-related deaths worldwide.

10. Ivan Marques, representing the Organization of American States, briefed the Board on confidence-building in the Americas, highlighting how transnational organized crime operating across borders had eroded trust between States in the region. He underscored the need to modernize transparency and confidence-building measures, extending them beyond their traditional inter-State focus to address non-State actors and unconventional drivers of insecurity such as cross-border crime and arms trafficking. He emphasized that such measures should involve a wider range of stakeholders and remain regionally owned and institutionally supported in order to serve as resilient, shock-absorbing tools.

E. Regional and comparative perspectives

11. In his food-for-thought presentation, member of the Board, Karim Haggag, examined regional approaches to nuclear transparency and confidence-building measures, with a focus on North-East Asia and the Middle East. He highlighted a growing mismatch between conventional frameworks for such measures and the evolving strategic environment, including a significant rise in global military spending. Regarding the Korean Peninsula, he noted that existing confidence-building measures had been progressively undermined by unsuccessful diplomacy,

and he called for better alignment between denuclearization objectives and near-term risk reduction. On the Middle East, he pointed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as a concrete illustration of what such measures could achieve in addition to drawing lessons from its fragility, and called for the development of new normative confidence-building measures, missile control measures and subregional approaches tailored to the specific dynamics of the region while also highlighting the advent of missile proliferation.

12. Mely Caballero-Anthony examined what she described as the central paradox of confidence-building: transparency and confidence-building measures were most needed precisely when trust was lowest and States were least willing to cooperate. Drawing on a comparative analysis of European and Asian experiences, she observed that European measures had tended towards formalization – codified in treaties with strong institutionalization and verification mechanisms – while Asian measures were largely informal, shaped by power asymmetries and historical sensitivities and implemented primarily through dialogue and voluntary practices. She cited the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as the primary vehicle for confidence-building in Asia, focused on transparency and preventive diplomacy, but noted its limitations in addressing major regional disputes.

13. Member of the Board, Hawa Ahmed Youssouf, presented the African regional perspective, recalling the concrete successes achieved through subregional transparency and confidence-building measures in addressing the impact of small arms, light weapons and improvised explosive devices used by non-State actors against civilian populations, including through amnesty programmes. She highlighted the African Union's ambition to play a greater and more influential role in disarmament and pointed to fellowship programmes designed to build a new generation of African disarmament diplomats. She raised the Treaty of Pelindaba, which had established a nuclear-weapon-free zone across Africa, as an important regional achievement, while noting that a number of African States wished to access civilian nuclear energy, and stressed the importance of equitable technology transfer to support that goal.

14. Member of the Board, Carolina Ricardo, presented a human-centred approach to disarmament and confidence-building, defined as placing the reduction of the human costs of weapons – and the well-being of populations – at the centre of peace and security policy, integrating human rights, sustainable development, public health and environmental considerations, as well as broadening participation to include civil society, academia and the private sector. She stressed the importance of integrating victim perspectives into those processes. Drawing on experience in small arms control in Latin America, she highlighted two complementary priorities for a human-centred approach: developing practical transparency and confidence-building measures through multilateral cooperation that account for differing national capacities, and strengthening partnerships between civil society and Governments to improve data collection – including on gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic factors – arms tracing and the implementation of the measures. She emphasized that broader stakeholder involvement strengthened both the transparency and the political durability of such measures, but that that must be complemented by sustained State commitment – civil society could create accountability pressure but could not be a substitute for political will.

Annex II

Members of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, 2026

Hawa Ahmed Youssouf

Former Minister of Women and Gender Affairs and Former Minister of International Cooperation of Djibouti
Djibouti

Nobumasa Akiyama

Professor at the School of International and Public Policy and the Graduate School of Law at Hitotsubashi University
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Marc Perrin de Brichambaut

Former Judge at the International Criminal Court
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Thompson Chengeta

Professor of Law and Artificial Intelligence Technologies at the School of Law of Liverpool John Moores University
Liverpool, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Karim Haggag

Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
Stockholm

Huaicheng Dai

Secretary-General of the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association
Beijing

Anton Khlopkov

Director of the Center for Energy and Security Studies
Moscow

Federica Mogherini

Former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and former Vice-President of the European Commission
Rome

Elina Noor

Non-resident scholar in the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Singapore

Patryk Pawlak

Part-time professor at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute
Florence, Italy

Carolina Ricardo

Executive Director of the Sou da Paz Institute
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Nicholas Ritchie

Professor of International Security at the University of York
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D. B. Venkatesh Varma (Chair)
Ambassador (ret.) and former Permanent Representative of India to the Conference
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Heather Williams
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Patricia Espinosa Cantellano
Ambassador Emeritus of Mexico, former Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Framework Convention on Climate Change and former Secretary of Foreign Affairs
of Mexico
Madrid

Robin Geiss (ex officio member)
Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
Geneva
