

**Intervention of Karel DE GUCHT, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
High-level Seminar on Proliferation of Weapons of Mass  
Destruction  
Egmont Palace, Brussels  
March 17th, 2005**

**CHECK UPON DELIVERY**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

"The Non-Proliferation Treaty is the corner stone of the global non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament."

How many times has this biblical expression been used, at the risk of making it sound like a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Yes, the Treaty contains clear and everlasting non-proliferation commitments; it aims at opening the path to the total elimination of nuclear weapons and advocates cooperation in the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy.

These are the essentials of the Treaty and it is in the interest of each and everyone of us to reaffirm our strong commitment to what we have agreed upon and to act accordingly.

But the Treaty is not a static document shielded from the living world and the effects of globalisation, daunting technological developments and new security perceptions.

If we want to preserve the viability of the NPT, we must show the intellectual courage to address these new issues, to reassess our priorities if needed, and be willing to do so with an open mind.

Why is it that the thirteen practical steps in the area of nuclear disarmament, adopted in 2000, have not all proven to be that practical?

How are we to cope with a break-out scenario, whereby certain States may decide to leave the NPT after having gained sufficient nuclear technology to bring them at the threshold of nuclear weapon capability?

Are we determined to counter the risk of terrorists and extremist groups acquiring nuclear or radiological material? What can we do to close the nuclear black market that caters to States and terrorists alike?

The 2005 NPT review conference offers us a unique opportunity to address these questions and to build wider international consensus on a revitalised and truly effective non-proliferation strategy.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

In preparing for the Review Conference, we would be well advised to consolidate the common ground that already exists.

The risk analysis is largely consensual, as illustrated by recent statements and studies from various origins, including the UN Secretary general, the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and the Director General of the International Atomic and Energy Agency.

They point to the risk of covertly and illegally developed full scale weapons programs, as well as to concerns about the erosion and possible collapse of the whole treaty regime, referring to the recent expansion of the technological potential. They also mention the clear desire of terrorists to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

In the wake of the horrific events of 9/11, the Belgian Presidency of the EU initiated an in-depth reflection on the implications of the terrorist threat on the non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control policy of the EU. Belgium advocated a multi-faceted approach that would also address the complex issues of root causes and dealing with non-state actors, and proposed to fill the existing loopholes in the global non-proliferation instruments. The Brussels European Council in December 2001 adopted conclusions that paved the way for the elaboration of the EU Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Our strategy is based on the conviction that an effective multilateral approach to security, including disarmament and non-proliferation, provides the best way to maintain international order.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

After having addressed the risks, the Review Conference should consider adopting new non-proliferation benchmarks.

First and foremost, we must underline that nuclear proliferation, while often rooted in unstable regional situations, is a global challenge that needs to be taken up at the global and multilateral level. This puts the UN Security Council in focus, together with the specialised UN agencies. We should build stronger bridges between the political and technical levels, while respecting their specific missions.

The adoption of Resolution 1540 by the Security Council is a promising new feature. The Security Council is determined to facilitate an effective response to global proliferation threats and to act accordingly under Chapter VII of the Charter. In other words, the Security Council is raising the stakes for would-be proliferators.

The resolution calls upon all States to present an implementation report. Belgium has done so.

Our report gives an overview of the Belgian WMD-related export control system and the enforcement measures in place. It confirms the participation of Belgium in the Proliferation Security Initiative, aimed at the interdiction of illegal trade in WMD related material.

The report also refers to our adherence to the G-8 Global Partnership, which co-ordinates the enormous international financial investment needed to eliminate the WMD stockpiles in the former Soviet-Union.

The EU should play an active role in providing assistance to interested States that face practical problems in implementing the provisions of Resolution 1540. Such a commitment would be reinforcing the new EU policy to include non-proliferation clauses in trade and cooperation agreements with third countries.

Besides, regular reporting on non-proliferation policies is in conformity with the principles of transparency and accountability that we want to uphold.

UN Security Council involvement in non-proliferation affairs leads us to raise the issue of the universal adherence to the NPT.

It is not logical to plead for a global approach to non-proliferation, yet continue to remain faced with a situation in which three countries are outside of the Treaty. We thus call upon these countries to accede to the Treaty as non-nuclear-weapons States.

We all understand that this question needs to be put in the appropriate regional context.

The fragile processes of raising the security quality in the Middle East and South Asia, merit our full support. At a certain point, the proliferation concerns will have to enter into these peace efforts, and that is where the international community, through innovative thinking, might have to intervene.

The EU Strategy rightly points out that the best solution to the proliferation of WMD is that countries would no longer feel they need them. We therefore will foster regional security arrangements and disarmament processes. In due course, the EU and other nations concerned will have to define their contribution to the elaboration of effective security assurances.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our plea for universalisation of the NPT is seriously hampered by negative proliferation developments occurring in certain countries. I would now like to address some of these key challenges to compliance.

Last February, North Korea announced that it has manufactured nuclear weapons. This statement runs counter to the international efforts to peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear problem. Belgium strongly condemns the North Korean announcement and urges that country to completely dismantle any nuclear weapons. North Korea must comply with all its relevant international commitments.

This must lead to, inter alia, the return of the Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Regardless of the final decision on North Korea, we will have to deal with the proliferation challenges and negative precedent-setting of the North Korean behaviour, even if that country considers that it is no longer party to the Treaty. A reiteration of the role of the UN Security Council in maintaining international peace and security, in the context of an announced withdrawal from the NPT, is definitely welcome and the Review Conference should look into this matter.

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The nuclear developments in Iran continue to be a source of preoccupation. It remains puzzling why the Atomic Energy Agency, after two years of inspections, is still not in a position to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear activities in Iran. The Agency's Director General pointed out that "In view of the past undeclared nature of significant aspects of Iran's nuclear programme and its past pattern of concealment, this conclusion can take longer than in normal circumstances." One should thus expect Iran to deploy every possible effort to clarify what is still too vague and to fully cooperate with the Agency inspectors. Iran would indeed be a prime beneficiary of these efforts to speed up the process of compliance and to remedy the confidence deficit it has created.

Yet, the recent Board of Governors received once more a verification report that, while noting progress in certain areas, pointed to developments that risk undermining the very confidence we need. For example, the undeclared excavation of tunnels at a uranium conversion site is not exactly a confidence building measure.

Iran must understand that in view of its compliance history, it has a proportionally higher degree of self-restraint to show than other countries, when it comes to developing the most sensitive parts of the nuclear fuel cycle.

Other States must understand that this infringement on the universal right to develop nuclear energy, is narrowly focused on countries of specific proliferation concern, labelled as such by the competent international organisation that is entrusted by all of us, under the NPT, to give objective guarantees about the purely peaceful use of nuclear energy. Various proposals made with regard to the multilateral control of the fuel cycle are to be considered from that perspective.

In this context, I would like to refer to the last report on Iran presented by the Agency's Director General, where he notes that "the focus of the Safeguards Agreements and Additional Protocols is nuclear materials".

He then continues by saying that "in the absence of some nexus to nuclear materials, the Agency's legal authority to pursue the verification of possible nuclear weapons related activity is limited".

This remark merits careful examination, since such unwarranted limitations may negatively impact on the Agency's core mission.

When discussing the creation of an open-ended special committee on verification and compliance, under the authority of the Board of Governors, one should take this matter up. Such committee could indeed be useful to identify new ways to exercise existing legal authorities to uncover and prevent prohibited activities.

The robust verification set in place by the Atomic Energy Agency in Iran will need to be maintained and may become part of the objective security guarantees that the international community is seeking from Iran. It is equally clear that any infraction on Iran's suspension of all enrichment related and reprocessing activities will trigger off the adoption by the Board of Governors of a decision, according to its statute, to notify the Security Council.

It should come as no surprise that these considerations are also key to further progress in the EU-Iran relationship at large. Iran's sustained suspension of enrichment is essential to the continuation of the various negotiations in place: the long-term arrangements under the Paris Agreement, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the parallel political dialogue. The Foreign Ministers Council of the EU is closely monitoring these processes and assures the required coherence and political backing.

Belgium wishes these negotiations to succeed. We welcome the broad support expressed by many nations, also recently by the United States.

During my recent talks with high-level Iranian envoys, I have stressed the importance of the European initiative as sole option currently available to Iran allowing for a diplomatic and peaceful settlement of this issue. I once more call on Iran to negotiate in good faith a future-oriented global package, that will be beneficial to the Iranian people and contribute to increased stability in the region.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

While it seems rather unavoidable to dwell at some length on the crucial proliferation segment of the NPT, I also want to highlight the importance Belgium attaches to the disarmament agenda.

In this regard, the conclusion of the 2000 Review Conference of the NPT, and in particular the thirteen practical steps for nuclear disarmament, created high expectations which unfortunately have not altogether been met. I therefore anticipate a lively debate on these issues.

The 2002 US-Russia Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions, following the successful and timely completion of the START reductions, constitutes the single most important positive event over the last five years and as such merits our appreciation. However, it cannot be considered to be the end station on the path towards the total elimination of the nuclear arsenals, as spelled out in article 6 of the Treaty.

For this reason, many States, including Belgium, keep insisting on the core principle of the irreversibility of disarmament agreements and on the active pursuit of further disarmament possibilities.

Belgium advocates a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies, to minimize the risk that these weapons will ever be used and to facilitate the process of their total elimination. I recognize that this objective will have to be reached in a graduated and prudent manner, but our efforts should be persistent and coherent.

Let me point out that NATO has radically reduced its reliance on nuclear forces. This has been manifested in the important reductions in the nuclear forces and stockpiles, the de-targeting policy and the sharp decrease in numbers and readiness levels of the dual-capable aircraft, the sole remaining nuclear component in the Alliance's strategy. NATO is also actively pursuing confidence and security building measures on nuclear weapons in its regular consultations with Russia. We look forward to seeing practical results from these measures in the near future.

Belgium believes that the further reduction and ultimate elimination of non-strategic nuclear weapons, as called for in the 2000 NPT conclusions, constitute an integral part of the nuclear arms reduction and disarmament process.

While the moratorium on nuclear testing is fortunately being respected, Belgium remains convinced that the early entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty would constitute an appreciable positive step. We therefore urge all States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify this Treaty.

The potential of the Conference on Disarmament is not being utilized. Several times, Belgium has actively contributed to concrete efforts to break the deadlock. We regret that the proposed compromise, which was welcomed by many members of the Conference on Disarmament, could not be reached.

Our proposal would have allowed for the immediate commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, as well as for the discussion of the complex issue of preventing an arms race in space and the establishment of an appropriate subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many in the world community are concerned with the apparent lack of progress in the nuclear disarmament field and predict an acrimonious debate at the Review Conference, with negative linkages and artificial conditions imposed by some on further developments in the proliferation area desired by others. This is not our approach.

We will participate in the negotiations in a serene and balanced manner. Belgium is more interested in achieving results where they are within reach, thus ensuring the viability of the NPT as well as of the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament process it set in motion.

Belgium intends to propose concrete suggestions for a forward-looking report, building on the consensus-oriented language we introduced at the preparatory committees. Ambition and realism can go hand in hand. Our diplomacy has proven to be most effective when it unites and builds bridges between visions, nations and cultures, without losing sight of our own ideals.

This international conference is inspired by the same philosophy. I wish you every possible success.

Thank you.