

UN Disarmament Commission debates ways to prevent arms race in outer space

Despite the deteriorating security situation, there are some signs of progress in the field of disarmament, such as the intention of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the United States to hold summit talks, a senior United Nations official said Monday.

"At a time when global anxieties about nuclear weapons are higher than at any time since the Cold War, measures for disarmament and arms control are more vital than ever," Thomas Markram, Deputy High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, told the opening of the 2018 session of the [UN Disarmament Commission](#), held in New York.

"Since September, there have been no fundamental changes in the interrelated trends that are eroding efficacy in arms control and negatively affecting international peace and security," added Mr. Markram, as he delivered a speech on behalf of High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu.

He stressed, however, that there have been some recent signs of progress that point to where the Commission can make a unique and constructive contribution.

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As for the reported commitment by the DPRK to denuclearization following the recent talks held in China, Mr. Markram said that "we hope these positive developments will be the start of a longer process of sincere dialogue leading to sustainable peace and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula."

Positive developments also include the successful reduction of strategic nuclear forces by Russia and the US to the levels required by their New START Treaty.

Looking to build on this momentum, the Commission has also included prevention of an arms race in outer space in its agenda for this session.

"One specific collateral measure for disarmament on which this body should certainly be able to make a contribution is the goal of preserving outer space as a realm free of conflict," Mr. Markram said, noting that several recent trends are impacting the security and sustainability of outer space activities.

These include: the massive growth in the number and diversity of actors operating in outer space, including governments and the private sector; the

proliferation of hazardous space debris; and increasing dependence on outer space in the civilian, government and military sectors.

“As long as some continue to see outer space as a potential realm for war-fighting, we will face increasing risk of weaponization and conflict,” he said.

However, there continues to be common ground among the major space-faring nations and other space actors on ways to make progress in a number of areas, including the implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures to mitigate misunderstandings and reduce risk, he noted.

The Commission was created in 1978 as a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly, composed of all Member States, to consider various issues in the field of disarmament and make recommendations.

Read more about [today's debate](#) here.

[UN condemns attack on civilians in north-east Nigeria](#)

Denouncing an attack on civilians in Nigeria's restive north-east region, a senior United Nations humanitarian official has called on all parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and ensure the protection of civilians.

According to reports, at least 34 people were killed and over 90 injured in the attack that took place on 1 April near Belle Village, in the outskirts of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state.

“[Innocent civilians continue to suffer daily](#) from direct and indiscriminate attacks in north-east Nigeria [and] endless numbers of explosions, brutal killings, abductions and lootings continue to uproot the lives of women, children and men daily,” said Yassine Gaba, the acting UN Humanitarian Coordinator, in a news release on Monday.

“I call on all parties to the conflict to end this violence and to respect human life and dignity.”

The situation in north-east Nigeria has witnessed a steady deterioration over the past few weeks, particularly in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.

Since the beginning of the year, at least 120 women, children and men are reported to have been killed and over 210 seriously injured, in over 22 attacks allegedly carried out by non-state armed groups directly targeting civilians.

Of particular concern is the safety of women and girls, who remain at a constant threat of grave human rights abuses and gender-based violence as well as of abduction.

On 19 February, 110 school girls were abducted in an attack in Dapchi, Yobe state. In 2014, the region witnessed one of the worst such incidents in which over 270 girls were abducted from a government school in Chibok.

Violence and insecurity in the region has left close to 7.7 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance – especially food, shelter, water, healthcare and protection.

Since the start of the conflict in 2009, more than 20,000 people have been killed; thousands of girls, women, boys and men have been abducted; and children continue to be used routinely as so-called “suicide” bombers.

[UN food aid to benefit 60,000 people in earthquake-hit Papua New Guinea](#)

The United Nations emergency food relief agency has airlifted over 80 metric tons of vital nutritional supplements – enough to feed approximately 60,000 people in earthquake-hit Papua New Guinea.

According to the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the aircraft carrying the nutrient-dense, high energy biscuits, departed the UN Humanitarian Response Depot in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Monday morning, and its life-saving cargo will reach those in need within days.

The plane used for the airlift was provided by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice-President and Prime Minister of UAE and the Ruler of Dubai.

[“\[This\] support is crucial to deliver humanitarian assistance to those most affected by this natural disaster,”](#) said Stefano Peveri, the head of the Humanitarian Response Depot in Dubai.

More than 270,000 people, including 125,000 children, remain dependent on humanitarian assistance across the Pacific island nation after it was hit by a devastating 7.5 magnitude earthquake in February.

The earthquake was followed by a series of severe aftershocks throughout March, causing widespread panic among communities.

In addition, Papua New Guinea already faced severe food insecurity and alarming malnutrition levels before the earthquake. WFP’s remote assessments estimate that approximately 37 per cent of the population, or 60,000 people, were severely food insecure before the earthquake.

The earthquake and its aftershocks have further impacted people in the most vulnerable areas of the country, destroying root crops and vegetable gardens; the primary food sources in the affected area, said the UN agency.

[Women and girls with autism must be empowered to overcome discrimination they face, says UN chief](#)

On [World Autism Awareness Day](#), United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has joined the global call to spotlight the need to empower women and girls with autism and involving them and their advocates in policy and decision-making to address the discrimination and other challenges they face.

“They face [...] barriers to accessing education and employment on an equal footing with others, denial of their reproductive rights and the freedom to make their own choices, and a lack of involvement in policy making on matters that concern them,” said the Secretary-General in his [message](#) on the Day.

Emphasizing that “our work for gender equality and women’s empowerment must reach all the world’s women and girls,” he stressed that the international community’s efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) must uphold the [2030 Agenda](#)’s core promise to leave no one behind.

The Goals and the landmark framework from which they emerged were adopted by UN Member States three years ago. Together they aim to wipe out poverty and boost equality by putting the world on a more sustainable economic, social and environmental path by 2030.

“On World Autism Awareness Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to promote the full participation of all people with autism, and ensure they have the necessary support to be able to exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms,” concluded the Mr. Guterres.

Autism is a lifelong neurological condition that manifests during early childhood, irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status. The term Autism Spectrum refers to a range of characteristics.

Autism is [mainly characterized](#) by its unique social interactions, non-standard ways of learning, keen interests in specific subjects, inclination to routines, challenges in typical communications and particular ways of processing sensory information.

The rate of autism in all regions of the world is high and the lack of

understanding has a tremendous impact on the individuals, their families and communities.

The World Day is marked annually on 2 April, and this year's [official UN commemoration](#) will be on Thursday, 5 April, with a half-day programme in New York entitled *Empowering Women and Girls with Autism*, that will feature a keynote address from Julia Bascom, Executive Director, Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

[UN chief calls for probe into deadly clashes along Israel-Gaza border](#)

Reporting that over the past three months, Israel has advanced 22 plans for some 1,200 housing units for one area of the West Bank, a United Nations envoy warned Monday that such ongoing settlement expansion is eroding the prospect of a two-state solution to the long-standing Middle East conflict.