

# INTERVIEW: 'Disarmament matters' in times of crisis, stresses new High Representative

6 July 2017 – Izumi Nakamitsu has taken the helm of United Nations disarmament affairs at a time when needs are greatest for the world to invest in conflict prevention.

Some argue that disarmament is not the right issue to negotiate when the international security environment is deteriorating.

“We counter that argument,” Ms. Nakamitsu, the newly appointed [High Representative for Disarmament Affairs](#), told *UN News*, stressing that “disarmament matters” even more so in times of high tensions over security issues.

“Disarmament is all about preventing major catastrophes in times of conflict,” she said. “It helps decrease tensions, create space for dialogue and build trust and confidence.”

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Her appointment also came at a critical phase of nuclear disarmament. UN Member States are negotiating a treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, with the talks scheduled to conclude on 7 July.

To date, however, a number of countries are staying out of the negotiations, including the United States, Russia and other nuclear-weapon States, as well as many of their allies, including Japan. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has not joined the talks either.

“Hopefully a treaty will be something they will be able to join eventually,” she said, stressing that “the door must be open to all States and this inclusiveness will have to be built into the treaty.”

Ms. Nakamitsu also spoke about the ongoing stalemate in the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, her goals for her first 100 days in office, and advice for women aspiring to senior UN leadership positions.



Inspectors from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inventory a stockpile of 22mm chemical artillery projectiles (file photo). Credit: OPCW

**UN News:** The Secretary-General has made conflict prevention one of his top priorities. How does the disarmament agenda fit into this picture?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** Disarmament is all about preventing major catastrophes in times of conflict. Everything we do in disarmament negotiations and discussions needs to fuse into the prevention agenda. What we are doing has an enormous preventive effect. Disarmament is also part of a political solution to the conflict. It helps decrease tensions, create space for dialogue and build trust and confidence. We counter the argument that when the international security environment is deteriorating or tensions are increasing, disarmament is not the right issue to be put on the table. Rather, because the security environment is difficult, we have to talk about disarmament. It has preventive and trust-building effects. It has to be part of a political solution to any dispute or conflict.

**UN News:** Disarmament is a politically charged subject. How do you intend to deal with this issue?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** Yes, it is politically sensitive and challenging. But the kind of work we do at the United Nations is always very challenging and politically sensitive. So the role we are expected to play is to build bridges between different political positions of Member States, give sound advice at the technical and substantive level, and make sure that Member States negotiating those very politically charged issues will be able to find their own solutions and find common ground. Political difficulty is just part of our job. And if I could add, that's why it is an exciting type of work.

**UN News:** The United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons is under way. What is the expected outcome? Nuclear-weapon States, many of their allies and States such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are missing from the negotiations. Does the absence of these States in the talks undercut the outcome?

Nuclear-weapon States and some of their allies are not able to join the negotiations at the moment, but hopefully a treaty will be something they will be able to join eventually.

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** Through a resolution, the General Assembly mandated Member States to negotiate a treaty. It is ongoing, so I can't really say what kind of treaty it is going to be. Member States are working very hard to conclude the negotiations by the 7 July deadline. It is true that a number of countries decided to stay out of the negotiations. Because which negotiations they will participate in or not is a decision made by those individual Member States, there is nothing we can say about it. But as the Secretariat, we've been advising Member States that are part of the negotiations that if they want to have the objectives of nuclear disarmament, then a treaty will have to be something that will become inclusive in the future.

Nuclear-weapon States and some of their allies are not able to join the negotiations at the moment, but hopefully a treaty will be something they

will be able to join eventually. The door must be open to all States. This inclusiveness will have to be built into the treaty. I hope concerns expressed by non-participants will be taken into account by those negotiating the treaty.

**UN News:** The Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament ([CD](#)) has not produced any concrete results since 1996. How can you help break this deadlock?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** The Conference on Disarmament has been in stalemate for the past 20-plus years. I was in Geneva recently. I sensed that the frustration of not having produced any substantial results is shared by many Member States that are part of the body. As a result of this shared feeling that something has to happen, there is now a working group on the way ahead. Member States are beginning to engage in a process of putting their heads together and find an option on how to move forward. I advise all Member States involved to think outside the box and to be creative and innovative to find common ground. They still consider the CD to be an important instrument. I will definitely support the efforts of Member States.

**UN News:** Disarmament is more than just nuclear disarmament. Can you briefly explain other aspects of work undertaken by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs ([UNODA](#))?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** Nuclear disarmament remains important, with the nuclear weapons prohibition treaty being negotiated at the moment and the preparatory process having started for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We are in a critical phase of the overall nuclear disarmament issue.

The vast majority of the victims today get killed by conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons.

But we also have a very acute, priority agenda in the area of chemical weapons. Chemical weapons use in Syria is one of the priority agendas not just for my office but also the Security Council and the international community. We have a very strong comprehensive Chemical Weapons Convention, but the taboo against chemical weapons use is unfortunately being undermined. We have to make sure that this norm is restored so that no chemical weapons use is allowed, and if it is violated, we have to bring perpetrators to accountability. We also have the Biological Weapons Convention and a number of different disarmament treaties. We need to make sure that proper implementation and well-functioning of these instruments continue. We have some financial issues with some of these, to which financial health must be brought back.

Conventional arms and light weapons is the area where we can demonstrate much more in terms of real impacts on the ground. The vast majority of the victims today get killed by conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons. This must be definitely highlighted as it has a direct link to what the UN does in its peace operations, etc. We work with governments to assist

their capacity-building in these areas, including ways to improve the safety and security of ammunition stockpiles in order to avoid accidental explosions and diversion of ammunition.



: Weapons being burnt during the official launch of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) process in Muramvya, Burundi. UN Photo/Martine Perret

The area I'm very interested in, and the Secretary-General is keen on, is what he calls 'frontier issues.' Those include cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Cyberattacks have become a regular occurrence. We need to make sure that these new issues, closely related to rapid technological and scientific development, will become a top priority of Member States. They are now addressing these concerns at the expert level but our work must also be accelerated and intensified in this area.

So disarmament has many dimensions. I hope, through some of our efforts in disarmament education, the public, especially younger people, will have a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes the disarmament agenda, which is very complicated and multifaceted.

**UN News:** You started your current position in May. What would you like to accomplish in your first 100 days and during your term?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** I'm new to disarmament. So for the first 100 days, my ambition is to fully understand the disarmament file, a hugely complicated area with a lot of technical details. I already began to understand the political side of the issue, but within 100 days I would like to understand those technical details and have a better knowledge of all areas of disarmament. During my tenure? Well, I'm sort of a humble person. I don't have catchy words to characterize my ambitions for the medium or longer term. But there are a couple of things. The international security environment is very difficult at the moment, but I would definitely like to achieve a political understanding among most of the Member States of the UN – that because it is difficult, disarmament matters.

And the second is sort of a creation of the political will at the level of the Member States. I would very much like to have some sort of a vision of the international community for disarmament in the 21st century. There are new issues like cyber (security), artificial intelligence, etc. Disarmament is actually one of the oldest mandates of the United Nations – it goes back to the founding of the United Nations. We have a unique place in the UN. But I think it will also be really good if we can bring disarmament into the 21st century, and understand the new issues that the international community has to grapple with and the priority and sequence of the issues that we have to put our heads together to create a safer and more secure world. That is what disarmament is all about – it is about making the world a safer, more secure place.

**VIDEO:** UN disarmament chief Izumi Nakamitsu flagged new challenges facing the disarmament agenda in the 21st century, while calling for greater political will by countries to tackle them.

**UN News:** The Secretary-General is committed to achieving gender parity in senior management appointments. What is the significance of a woman leading UN disarmament affairs?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** I'm the second female to head the UN disarmament office. I never actually thought about it. At the professional level, I don't think it makes much difference if you are a man or woman leading an office in any field. The important thing is that whoever is most qualified, men or women, should be doing the job. That's what the message should be.

**UN News:** Can you speak a bit about the strengths women can bring to disarmament?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** I don't usually generalize things. I have worked in the field and met female snipers. You cannot necessarily say women are peace-loving. But women's soft-spoken style or gentle approach may make a difference when tensions are high. I have always been able to speak to the most difficult people in those situations. I think it was partly because I am a woman. I showed up at negotiations at the country or local levels or at checkpoints; commanders were not expecting that a woman would show up to negotiate with them. The area of peace and security, including disarmament, tends to be still a bit dominated by men, as many people used to come with military backgrounds. But it's changing. What we do at the UN is political work. So if you are interested in peace and security, and a woman, the door is wide open for you.

**UN News:** Do you have any advice for women aspiring to senior UN leadership positions?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** Work hard. If you are working hard and doing a good job, have a trust in the system that there are always people who are watching you and appreciating your work. Think about how to excel in your job.

**UN News:** How does your previous experience in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) and other parts of the UN system help you in your current post?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** Many different ways. I'm happy to have done all these different areas of work. Definitely for one thing, the network of people I have across the UN system is useful. Everywhere I go, I usually know people. That helps because if I need to do something or move a difficult file, I can always call up different people and ask them to give me advice. But more substantively, because of my years of experience in different fields, I really understand the close linkages between conflict, peace and security, humanitarian affairs and development, and how we need to look at these things more comprehensively to find a solution. One often-talked-about weakness

within and beyond the UN system is working in silos.



The remains of the Prefectural Industry Promotion Building, later preserved as a monument – known as the Genbaku Dome – at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. UN Photo

**UN News:** Being a national of Japan, the only country to have suffered nuclear attacks, is there anything you can do to advance the disarmament agenda? What kind of role do you think Japan can play in this regard?

**Izumi Nakamitsu:** *Hibakusha*, survivors of nuclear bombs, have been courageously sharing their stories and experiences. That has really moved a number of very influential actors in the international peace movement and across civil society around the world. They have not just kept nuclear disarmament discussions alive, but created additional momentum. Whenever I talk about nuclear disarmament, I always try to refer to their heroic and tireless efforts. I can be a messenger who spreads their words around the world through my work at the UN as well as convey voices I pick up from the international community back to Japan.

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## [Monthly global food price index up 1.4 per cent; cereal stocks set to hit new record, says UN agency](#)

6 July 2017 – Rising prices of cereals, meat and dairy products have pushed the global food price index up by 1.4 per cent compared to last month and 7.0 per cent compared to last year, the United Nations agriculture agency has said.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), the rise in the [Food Price Index](#) – a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities – was largely because of surging prices of high-protein wheat due to deteriorating crop conditions in the United States.

June marked the [second successive month of increase](#) in the value of the Food Price Index, read an update issued by the UN agency.

On the other hand, price indices for vegetable oils and sugar declined by 6.5 points (3.9 per cent) and nearly 31 points (13.4 per cent), respectively, it added.

The fall in the Sugar Price Index marked a new 16-month low. The prices have

fallen steadily since February, with the continued decline reflecting large export availabilities, in particular robust Brazilian supplies.

Weak import demand has exerted further downward pressure on [sugar] quotations, especially as purchases by the world's leading importer, China, have slowed following the imposition of high import tariffs," said FAO.

In terms of the indices, the Cereal Price Index averaged 154.3 points in June (up 6.2 points compared to May); Vegetable Oil Price Index, 162.1 points (down 6.5 points); Dairy Price Index, 209 points (up 15.9 points); Sugar Price Index (197.3 points, down nearly 31 points).

The Meat Price Index averaged 175.2 points in June (up 3.2 points). However, this value was derived using a mixture of projected and observed prices as most prices used in the calculation of the Index were not available when the Food Price Index was computed.

#### *Cereal stocks on course to hit new record*

Also today, FAO announced that despite tightening supply conditions for high-protein wheat, [global cereal supplies are likely to remain abundant](#) in the coming year.

World cereal stocks are expected to expand further to a new record high of around 704 million tonnes," said the UN agency, announcing its updated [Cereal Supply and Demand Brief](#), also released today.

According to the Brief, the June forecast for global wheat output in 2017 were revised down, while those of maize and rice rose and global cereal production this year is likely to total 2,593 million tonnes, some 0.6 per cent below that of 2016.

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## **Secretary-General outlines steps to strengthen UN's development framework**

5 July 2017 – Secretary-General outlines steps to strengthen UN's development framework Stating that the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development is the "boldest agenda for humanity" and requires equally bold changes in the United Nations development system, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today outlined steps to better place the Organization to deliver tangible results in the lives of the people it serves.

["We need to change in order to secure the promise of sustainable development, human rights and peace](#) for our grandchildren and we have no time to lose," Mr. Guterres told the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

“The UN development system, therefore, must itself be far more integrated [and aligned] in our response [...] to work seamlessly across sectors and specializations – and to do so more effectively.”

Mr. Guterres noted that his report to the Council (on repositioning the UN development system) is an integral component of the broader reform agenda at the UN to better meet the world’s complex and interlinked challenges.

He added that his ideas and proposals are intended to spur further discussions in the Council and to solicit the views of Member States on a number of key areas. A more detailed report will be submitted in December.

### ***Eight guiding ideas***

Mr. Guterres highlighted eight key guiding areas for his proposed reforms. The first is accelerating the transition of the UN development system from the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) to the 2030 Agenda and, at the same time, closing gaps and improving skillsets.

“We must be able to provide advice, pool expertise and help governments implement the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and help convene the partners they require to take actions to scale,” he said.

He also highlighted the need for a stronger focus on financing for development to help governments better leverage financing as well as working with a broad range of actors including the private sector, international financial institutions and other partners.

Another area of focus is enhancing the effectiveness of UN Country Teams – which comprise all UN agencies operating in a particular country – to build on the strengths of individual agencies while delivering with greater coherence, unity and accountability.

He also underlined the need to “delink” the functions of UN Resident Coordinators from UNDP Resident Representatives to enable more effective and integrated analysis and planning at the country level to encompass the dimensions of sustainable development.

Further, he noted that reform efforts would be taking place at the headquarters levels as well to ensure that no new bureaucracies or superstructures are created.

To that end, he announced that Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed has been tasked to oversee and provide strategic guidance to the UN Development Group and lead a Steering Committee to strengthen coherence between humanitarian action and development work.

Other areas of focus included strengthening a more cohesive UN policy voice at the regional level; strengthening accountability of the UN development system; and ensuring effective and efficient funding structures that would offer greater value-for-money and reporting on system-wide results.



*Success will be seen through results on the ground*

Noting that the success of the reforms would be seen in tangible results in the lives of the people served by the Organization, the Secretary-General said that many of the issues raised in the report would require further consideration and that he looked forward to working with the Member States on that matter.

“Repositioning the UN development system is our shared responsibility [...] I am convinced that, together, we can take the bold steps that the new agenda requires and that humanity deserves,” he stated.

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## [New UN report encourages African countries to harness growing tourism sector](#)

5 July 2017 – African governments should make it easier and safer for Africans to travel within the continent, the United Nations said in a new report released today, noting that tourism demand there is increasingly driven by Africans themselves.

“Tourism is a dynamic sector with phenomenal potential in Africa. Properly managed it can contribute immensely to diversification and inclusion for vulnerable communities,” said Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development ([UNCTAD](#)).

The agency’s [“Economic Development in Africa Report 2017](#) focuses on tourism for transformative and inclusive growth.

Chantal Line Carpentier, Chief of UNCTAD’s New York office, said tourism export revenues tripled since 1998, from \$14 billion to nearly \$47 billion. Tourism now contributes to about 8.5 per cent of the continent’s gross domestic product (GDP), compared with 6.8 per cent in 1998.

“African tourism is increasingly driven [by Africans themselves](#) due to a growing middle-income class,” Ms. Carpentier told a press conference at UN Headquarters, adding that four out of 10 international tourists in Africa are from the continent itself.

“By 2026, tourism’s direct contribution to GDP is forecast to surpass \$121 billion,” she noted.

Highlighting some of the findings from the report, Ms. Carpentier said to realize the continent’s economic growth, governments should take steps to liberalise air transport, promote the free movement of persons, ensure

currency convertibility and, crucially, recognise the value of African tourism and plan for it.

She noted the importance of easing red tape in travel between countries, such as limiting the number of visas needed when traveling on the continent, using the European Union's one visa as an example.

The UN official also noted the importance of keeping money in the continent – such as by sourcing food from local farmers, many of whom are living in poverty, instead of importing from overseas.

“This will require capacity building for producers to meet international standards and produce in time to meet demands,” Ms. Carpentier noted.

She added that the growing tourism sector offers opportunities for young people, who globally make up about half of the tourism labour force.

The sector is also heavily women-driven, with nearly one-third of jobs taken up by women, and nearly half in the hotel and restaurant sector.

#### *Tourism and perceptions of peace*

Another important theme highlighted in the report is the mutually beneficial relationship between peace – or its perceptions – and tourism.

It notes that the economic impacts of political stability can be quite significant and long-lasting. For example, following political instability in Tunisia, total tourism receipts in 2009–2011 declined by 27 per cent on average, from \$3.5 billion in 2009 to \$2.5 billion in 2011.

“Addressing safety and security concerns as well as swift responses to crises by African governments and regional institutions are paramount to the growth of tourism in Africa,” UNCTAD said.

“Promoting strategies aimed at improving Africa's image in the global media are also critical in ensuring the sector's recovery after conflict or political unrest.”

The mere appearance of instability in a region can deter tourists, leading to devastating, long-lasting economic consequences. However, the perception of danger does not always correspond with reality, according to the UN agency.

The 2014 Ebola outbreak in western Africa, despite being isolated to relatively few countries in that region, resulted in a loss across the entire continent.

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## Former UN envoy urges continued vigilance in fight against sexual exploitation and abuse

5 July 2017 – While a number of steps have been taken to address the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), the former deputy head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) has urged continued vigilance to ensure that the world body's personnel do no harm while carrying out their duties.

"We can never take anything for granted. Every day, every step of the way, every time we set up a new mission, every time you deploy a new contingent, you've got to put in place the measures that are going to stamp out SEA. And we've got to keep doing it," said Diane Corner.

Since 2014, Ms. Corner, a British national, served as the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR ([MINUSCA](#)).

The past few years have been particularly challenging for the CAR, a country of 4.5 million people that was plunged into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In addition, MINUSCA – which was deployed with the aim of protecting civilians, supporting the transition process and facilitating humanitarian assistance, among other tasks – has been dealing with numerous allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by its personnel.

"It was a huge shock to the Mission," Ms. Corner recalled in an interview with UN News upon the completion of her assignment, adding that it "really turned us upside down" in the way it approached the problem.

"I insisted that we should be transparent. I insisted that we should try and adopt a victim-centred approach. I say try because, in a country like the Central African Republic, there's not much by way of provision for anybody actually, anybody in need. So you have to do your best to use the services that were available and maximize that."

In the wake of the allegations that arose in CAR, as well as in other missions, the UN took a number of measures to prevent such abuses; to respond quickly and effectively to allegations that come to light; to protect and support victims; and to demand zero impunity – recognizing that in the case of uniformed personnel, accountability is a shared responsibility requiring action by Member States.

Ms. Corner noted that what happened in CAR prompted the UN system as a whole

to address the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse in “a completely different way” now.

“So if there’s any good that’s come out of this, it’s the fact that the chances of it happening again are reduced but I think we need to be constantly vigilant,” she stressed. “We can never take anything for granted.

“Every day, every step of the way, every time we set up a new mission, every time you deploy a new contingent, you’ve got to put in place the measures that are going to stamp out SEA. And we’ve got to keep doing it.”

**VIDEO:** The former deputy chief of the UN mission in CAR, Diane Corner, listed highlights during her tenure, including Pope Francis’ visit and the country’s elections.

Ms. Corner also pointed out that it makes a “huge difference” having women in leadership positions in the UN. “Obviously, you see things differently,” she noted. “Not to say that there aren’t some men who’ve been fantastic champions of the fight against SEA, and we’ve had some of them in our mission as well.

“I think women have more of an understanding of what it means for the victims, and maybe have more of an insight as to how to have a more holistic response to ensure that we really are taking this seriously and that we’re doing everything that we can.”

She added that often the protagonists and the combatants are men, while women are the ones who suffer. “We’ve seen in CAR for example, that between communities, when there are problems, when there are tensions, it’s very often the women coming back together again who re-create the bonds between communities.

“And I think women take... a longer-term view because they think of the coming generation, of their children, and so they’ll really invest in trying to ensure that peace is restored, that they can look after their families,” she stated.

“I just think that they can be a very powerful force for good.”

Ms. Corner added that the importance of MINUSCA cannot be overstated. “In CAR, if MINUSCA wasn’t there, you would’ve had a genocide,” she stated.

“In my mind, there’s no doubt we’ve saved tens and tens of thousands of lives in CAR, no doubt at all.”