

## UN regional approach to Disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

*"We acknowledge that we are living in an interdependent and global world and that many of today's threats recognize no national boundaries, are interlinked and must be tackled at the global, regional and national levels in accordance with the Charter and international law "*

**2005 Summit Outcome**

The added value of a regional approach to UN disarmament efforts has been acknowledged for almost 3 decades. A Group of Governmental Experts appointed by the Secretary-General concluded in 1981 that there was a vast and, to a large extent unexplored, potential for progress in disarmament if the global approach was supplemented with determined and systematic efforts at the level of the different regions. The Group of Experts found that progress in regional disarmament, the equitable solution of problems and the just settlement of disputes at the regional level, along with regional confidence-building measures, could create conditions that would promote disarmament and relax tension at the global level.<sup>1</sup> Concluding its consideration of the question in 1993, the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) adopted guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament. The UNDC found that regional and global approaches to disarmament and arms limitation complemented each other and should be pursued simultaneously, in order to promote regional and international peace and security.<sup>2</sup>

Year after year, since 1990, the General Assembly has re-iterated the importance of regional disarmament efforts by stating that "global and regional approaches to disarmament complement each other and should therefore be pursued simultaneously to promote regional and international peace and security".<sup>3</sup> Every year, approximately half of the General Assembly resolutions related to disarmament include a regional component. Furthermore, over the years, the United Nations has sought to enhance, in tangible terms, the role of regional approaches to disarmament and security, including as a complement to global efforts.

Initially, regional proposals sought to limit conventional weapons and armed forces at the end of the Second World War, but by the mid-1950's, the spread of nuclear weapons in Europe had become a predominant concern. Several proposals were made to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) in different parts of the continent or to freeze the level of nuclear forces pending actual reductions. In the decades that followed, the establishment of such zones assumed particular importance in light of the evolving nuclear threat. The regional approach was first applied to the nuclear field in the late 1950's with the prohibition of nuclear weapons in Antarctica.<sup>4</sup> It was subsequently expanded with the creation of NWFZs in other parts of the world: Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco, 1967); the South Pacific (Treaty of Raratonga, 1985); Southeast Asia (Bangkok Treaty, 1995); and Africa (Pelindaba Treaty, 1995).

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<sup>1</sup> "2005 Summit Outcome", A/RES/60/1

<sup>2</sup> UNDC "Guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament within the context of global security", (A/48/42), Annex II. See also "Establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned" (A/54/42), Annex I

<sup>3</sup> General Assembly resolution of 5 December 2007 on Regional disarmament (A/Res/62/38).

<sup>4</sup> For details, see the most recent report of the Secretary-General on Antarctica (A/57/346).

In 1999, the UN Disarmament Commission adopted guidelines and recommendations for the establishment of future nuclear-weapon-free zones, advancing the notion that those regional and global approaches to disarmament and arms limitation complemented each other and should be pursued simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> The document noted that NWFZs had ceased to be exceptional in the global strategic environment with more than 100 States signatories or parties to such treaties covering more than 50 per cent of the Earth's land mass. It underscored that such zones were an important disarmament tool, which contributed to the primary objective of strengthening regional peace and security and, by extension, international peace and security.

The changing political climate of the post-cold war period also prompted further analysis of the UN's role in advancing regional approaches to disarmament in the conventional field. Given the surge in conflict-related demands placed upon the UN and the Security Council's increasing central role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, the Organization's expanding mission required the increasing participation of regional and sub-regional actors. By adopting regional security initiatives that were tailored to the specific needs of the participating States, it was possible to reach agreement on measures more far-reaching than those that could be adopted at the global level.

In this regard, major regional disarmament developments have taken place in various regions. They include the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact and the related document on CSBMs,<sup>6</sup> through which significant reductions in conventional arms and armed forces, as well as confidence-building (CBM) and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM) were undertaken. The CFE, including its verification procedures survived the end of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 and, in 1999 the verification procedures were amended to take account of national forces rather than bloc strength.

In the Latin American region, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted two instruments: the 1997 Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials;<sup>7</sup> and the 1999 Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions.<sup>8</sup> In Asia, several CBMs have been undertaken in through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF),<sup>9</sup> and through bilateral and multilateral agreements. In June 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)<sup>10</sup> was established to promote mutual confidence and trust and consolidate multilateral cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region.

In Africa, the growing number of conflicts in the 1990's prompted the United Nations and several regional and sub-regional organizations to focus their attention on resolving them and

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the Disarmament Commission, 1999 (A/54/42)

<sup>6</sup> For the texts of the CFE Treaty and Vienna Documents on CSBMs, which were updated at the Istanbul Summit meeting in 1999, see documents CFE DOCUMENT/2/99/ and FSC DOCUMENT/1/99

<sup>7</sup> A/53/78, Annex The text is reproduced in *The Yearbook*, vol 22: 1997, Appendix III.

<sup>8</sup> AG/RES 1607 (XXXIX-0/99) The text is reproduced in *The Yearbook*, vol 24: 1999, Appendix II.

<sup>9</sup> Non-mandatory CBMs discussed and implemented within the ARF include: exchange of information on observation and prior notification of military exercises, exchange of visits to military establishments and naval vessels, holding seminars and workshops with defence and military officials, visits to defence facilities and dialogue on defence policy and conversion

<sup>10</sup> Member States of SCO are: China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

preventing future ones. Efforts intensified to curb proliferation of conventional arms, especially the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons (SALW). Indeed, increased global concern over the proliferation of and illicit trade in SALW, and their devastating consequences, led to the convening in 2001 of a United Nations Conference on this issue<sup>11</sup> and to the adoption of a consensus Programme of Action.<sup>12</sup> The Programme of Action again reiterated the importance of increased cooperation between the United Nations, regional, sub-regional and inter-governmental organizations with the aim of preventing, combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. Under the umbrella of regional and sub-regional organizations, important initiatives were undertaken in many regions of the world.<sup>13</sup>

In recognition of the increasing interdependence of international and regional efforts in the maintenance of international peace and security, the 2005 World Summit world leaders supported a stronger relationship between the United Nations and regional organizations in promoting international peace and security, as envisaged in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, and in combating terrorism.<sup>14</sup> More specifically, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1631 (2005) which “stresses the potential role of regional and sub-regional organizations in addressing the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and the need to take into account in the peacekeeping operations’ mandates, where appropriate, the regional instruments enabling states to identify and trace illegal small arms and light weapons.”

It is within this evolving historical awareness of the added value of a regional approach to disarmament, and within the framework of the various Security Council and General Assembly mandates, that the UN continues to promote and undertake regional disarmament initiatives, including in collaboration with regional and sub-regional organizations.

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter III, the UN Disarmament Yearbook, Volume 26, 2001

<sup>12</sup> See the UN Document A/CONF 192/15

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter III, the UN Disarmament Yearbook: Volume 27, 2002; Volume 28, 2003; and Volume 29, 2004

<sup>14</sup> “2005 Summit Outcome”, A/RES/60/1