



CLOSING REMARKS

By

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Afternoon Seminar:

Military and development spending in an era of austerity

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Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the International Peace Bureau for organizing today's event. The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs lauds the tireless efforts by the International Peace Bureau and others in raising awareness on the issue of excessive military spending. UNODA has been fully supportive of the Global Day of Action on Military Expenditures since the initiative started in 2011.

While the new data on global military expenditures, released by SIPRI today, show a slight decline in global military expenditures for 2012, the overall level of spending remains unacceptably high – all the more so because with just a few years left, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 remains an elusive goal. The World Bank has estimated that if only five percent of the amount the world currently spends on armaments could be spent to provide for education, health care and other goals in the MDGs, it could lift billions of people out of poverty.

Multilateral reduction of military budgets has long been pursued in the context of the United Nations. In 1981, UN Member States established an instrument whereby States publish and exchange information on military budgets, with a belief that such transparency would foster confidence among States, which in turn could prompt States to reduce their military budgets and instead spend resources on social and economical goals that improve people's lives. However, participation by States to the UN Report on Military Expenditures, as it is called today, has been on the decline in recent years. On average, less than one third of the UN Member States have submitted reports on their military expenditure in the last three years.

It is deplorable that UN Member States do not fully utilize an already available UN instrument to promote transparency in, and eventual reduction of, military budgets. Increase in transparency in military expenditures not only fosters confidence and trust among States, but also facilitates discussion among States on ways and means to reduce military budgets and identify areas where such reductions could be sought. The detailed format for reporting to the UN Report on Military Expenditures, in which States are requested to report on their expenditures by force groups and by items such as personnel cost, operation and procurement, is intended to serve that purpose.

The decline in transparency is not unique in the area of military expenditure. Transparency in conventional arms transfers, as measured by the reporting rate to the UN Register of Conventional Arms, to give an example, has also been on the decline since the mid-2000s. The Group of Governmental Experts on the UN Register met just last week in Geneva, to discuss measures to address and reverse this downward trend, among other issues.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs maintains a database where reports provided by Member States to the UN Report on Military Expenditures are available for the general public (www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/Milex).

In conclusion, I'd like to once again thank the International Peace Bureau for organizing this event, and thank the panelists and all participants for their continued interest in this important matter.