



**United Nations Office
for Disarmament Affairs**

**Africans Against the Bomb: Conference
25 September 2024**

**Adedeji Ebo
Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

As delivered

New York
25 September 2024

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address you today at this important event, under the rubric of Africans Against the Bomb. When Dr Olamide Samuel reached out to me, I knew at once that this was, for me, not only an honor, but an important duty.

Allow me to share six (6) basic but key messages which, in my view, could help to shape your discussions.

Message #1: What you see, depends on where you stand. This basic message points to the significance of the global context within which we are discussing ‘the Bomb’. So, where is the world currently in relation to ‘the Bomb’, to be clear, the nuclear bomb? The short answer is that the world is presently not in a good place particularly on the matter of nuclear threat.

Geopolitical divides have only deepened over the past few years, and cracks in the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture have become more visible. As at 2023, global military expenditure reached \$2.44 trillion USD while violence cost the global economy nearly \$20 trillion, 13.5% of global GDP.

As you are well aware, this conference takes place amidst an ever-evolving nuclear landscape, characterized by the unravelling of global norms against the use, spread and testing of nuclear weapons, as well as dangerous nuclear rhetoric. Nuclear weapons are featuring more increasingly in national security strategies. At the same time, the risk of a nuclear weapon being used – whether intentionally, accidentally or by miscalculation – is at the highest point in decades.

States possessing nuclear weapons are avoiding diplomacy, opting rather for armament. Arms spending is at historic levels but there is no commensurate investment in dialogue. Every nuclear-weapon State is modernizing their arsenals in ways that will make their weapons smarter, more accurate, faster, and stealthier. As the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs has consistently warned, we are already in the midst a qualitative nuclear arms race. Perhaps more worryingly, we may also be on the edge of a quantitative arms race.

To be clear therefore, we are in a precarious state, of heightened tensions, extremism, nativism. The ever-increasing levels of military expenditure point more to a culture of war, rather than a culture of peace which is our common goal.

And yet the very first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly was to call for the elimination of nuclear weapons. It is a tragedy that, nearly eighty years later, some 12,500 nuclear weapons still remain in our world, and it is a world that seems to be driving towards the Bomb rather than away from it. As the UN Secretary-General has said, the world is at an inflection point. Let us hope that the Pact for the Future which was adopted in New York a few days ago (last Sunday) signals better days ahead for multilateralism which would move the world away from, rather than towards 'the Bomb'.

Message #2: The nuclear threat is too important to be left to NWS alone.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, its use would have global ramifications. A single nuclear bomb can destroy a whole city, not to mention jeopardize the natural environment and lives of future generations through its long-term catastrophic effects. It is therefore essential that all countries, all regions and

indeed all peoples, are engaged, and play a role in efforts to bring about their elimination. Africa therefore has a responsibility in this regard, as a critical building block of multilateral disarmament.

As nuclear weapons threaten everyone, it is too important to be left to NWS alone. It is incumbent on all of us to work towards this goal, including by calling for NWS to maintain and accelerate the implementation of their disarmament commitments.

The world needs to hear – and would benefit from hearing – Africa’s voice on these issues. It is however worth emphasizing that while the nuclear threat is global, regional contexts differ. It is important to locate regional particularities within the global context....and which takes me to my next key message related to the African context.

Message #3: Pelindaba should be a platform for action, not a ceiling:

Africa’s proactive stance against the Bomb is encapsulated in, and embodied by the Treaty of Pelindaba of 1996, which established the African nuclear-weapon-free zone. Speaking in 2005, then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan – a great African – recalled “the strategic and moral value of nuclear-weapon-free zones.”

The deep roots of Pelindaba are worth recalling. They go all the way back to 1964 and the call by the (then) Organization of African Unity for a treaty to ensure the denuclearization of Africa. The Treaty of Pelindaba is a testament to Africa’s leadership and commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons.

But we are no longer in 1964, and it is not enough to recall glory of past leadership. We must sustain, consolidate and enhance Africa’s capacity and capability to fully live up to its impactful potential in the future. In this regard,

while the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) has emerged as a major instrument for Africa's contributions to the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control agenda and its legitimacy is beyond doubt, it is still in its early stages. The NPT remains the main pillar of multilateralism in this area. It means, practically therefore, that critics and supporters of the TPNW need to find a way of coexisting, in which they can acknowledge their differences but continue to work on the search for common ground.

Message #4: Africans Against the Bomb: So what are the elements for an African Agenda: The Pelindaba treaty should not be the final destination at which we have permanently and definitively arrived, but rather, a significant milestone that set the basis for further action in Africa's stance against the Bomb. Based on, and beyond Pelindaba therefore, this conference should explore the opportunities that exist for amplifying Africa's stance against the Bomb. I will make a couple of suggestions in this regard.

A decade ago, the African Group called for meaningful progress towards a nuclear weapon-free world at the 2014 Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. That conference was instrumental in building momentum and support for convening TPNW negotiations. Less than one year after the TPNW was adopted in 2017, the further Ordinary Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Treaty of Pelindaba called upon AU Member States "to speedily sign and ratify the [TPNW]." A year later, the AU Peace and Security Council adopted a communiqué reiterating this call. Today, well over sixty percent of African States have signed or ratified the TPNW. This is commendable but we can do even better.

We must remain constantly reminded of the sanctity of the three pillars of the NPT as the foundation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime (non-

proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The question for this conference is how can Africa better ensure a balance in the implementation of the tripod of this regime? In particular, how can Africa ensure greater accountability and commitment from the nuclear-weapon States, while taking optimal advantage of the opportunities of nuclear energy to advance SDGs?

Mesage #5: The young shall inherit the earth- and it is our duty to support them: The future of the planet literally belongs to the youth. We must support African youth to engage on this issue...especially bearing in mind that 60% of Africa's population are under the age of 25, the youngest population in the world. We should support and promote the role of the youth in disarmament and non-proliferation, including through disarmament education, professional networks and talent pipelines. By so doing, we ensure that African voices are heard, and that Africans are part of decision-making at the highest levels.

It is encouraging that African youth are eager and invested in global efforts to advocate for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Youth-led and youth-inclusive organizations, such as Youth4TPNW, provide a platform for young people from Africa to learn about nuclear disarmament and acquire tools and knowledge to contribute to the field.

I am proud to add that African youth also participate actively in the Office for Disarmament Affairs' youth engagement programmes, providing unique regional perspectives to strengthen approaches to build a safer world for everyone, everywhere, and enriching networks developed as part of the Youth Champions for Disarmament Training Programme and the Youth Leader Fund for a World Without Nuclear Weapons.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my sixth and final message is beyond the issue of the Bomb and extends to all of Africa's efforts at multilateral engagements more broadly.

Message #6: United we stand, divided we fall: I started my presentation with an overview of where the world currently stands with regards to global peace and security. I would like to devote my concluding message to the positioning of Africa in the world. Africa, as we know, occupies a marginalized role in the global political economy, with implications for the weight the continent brings to multilateralism. It is therefore important to emphasize that the effectiveness of Africa's stance against the Bomb will depend, to a large extent, on the cohesion, the collectiveness, the togetherness of Africa's agency in multilateral discourses. Africa needs a common voice.

Disarmament is about people, coming together to take action. On this topic, it is about Africans coming together to take action against the Bomb. The impact of such action would be most effective when Africa has a common cause and a common agenda. Without a common front on this issue, the result would be dissipated agency that is not impactful which would leave the continent further marginalized.

Disarmament and arms control are about people coming together to take action for peace. This is empowering, but also brings with it an enormous responsibility. While we can create positive change, we must bear in mind that reinforcing such change requires adherence by states to agreed international norms, treaties and other forms of cooperation which ultimately depend on trust, solidarity and universality between states. Trust, solidarity and universality represent the oxygen of multilateralism without which a culture of peace is not attainable. Yet, the UN Secretary-General has reminded us in his New Agenda

for Peace that this oxygen is increasingly in short supply. We must therefore collectively, including through today's conference, do all we can to enhance the prospects for building trust, solidarity and universality.

This Conference – and the work of Africans Against The Bomb – gives me enormous hope regarding the prospects of continued and impactful African engagement in global efforts towards a world free of nuclear weapons. This important conference is an exciting opportunity for new and creative ideas towards strengthening Africa's role in multilateral disarmament. So, I challenge you to put forward useful proposals and I wish you fruitful exchanges.

Thanks again for the invitation and for granting me audience.