

24-30 October 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
to mark the Observance of Disarmament Week**

On 24 January 1946 the United Nations General Assembly adopted its very first resolution. That resolution focused on disarmament and called for "the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction." Over the years Member States, through a series of pivotal conventions, have supported the United Nations disarmament initiatives. It is worth noting that even during the Cold War there were bilateral agreements on non-proliferation issues.

Notwithstanding that there has been some progress on non-proliferation, the threat to the world from weapons of mass destruction appears to be as great as ever. In particular, more states have, or are in the process of acquiring nuclear technology. Indeed, there is a very real danger that non-state groups or individuals may one day acquire and use the deadliest weapons known to humankind. The elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, must therefore remain the most urgent priority because of their potentially devastating effect globally.

But other weapons also pose a grave threat to the peace and security of our world. According to a recent UNDP report, there are at least a half a billion rifles, pistols and other small arms in circulation around the world. Easy access to these weapons as well as the continued production and use of landmines, has shattered lives and ruined economies in particular in the developing world. The illegal trade in mass produced modern lightweight weapons and small arms has made it easier for children, who have been ruthlessly conscripted into armies, to become efficient killers virtually overnight.

This year, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the historic First Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament. At that meeting, there was agreement on a Final Document consisting of a Declaration of Principles, a Program of Action and Machinery for Disarmament. Let us in this Disarmament Week and in the spirit of that landmark event, reflect on concrete, practical steps to achieve the goal of disarmament. I appeal to countries to uphold the principles of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). I urge those countries that have not already done so to ratify the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). It is also imperative that Member States take urgent action through legislation or other means to halt the illegal trade in small arms, light weapons and landmines.

The first stated purpose of the United Nations in the Charter is to maintain international peace and security. Disarmament is an essential step towards fulfilling that mandate. Progress in disarmament requires not only extensive bilateral and multilateral cooperation; it also requires sustained effort by individuals and civil society. It is imperative now more than ever before that we confront the serious threat that arms and armament pose to our global community. We must collectively intensify our efforts to achieve the long-standing disarmament goals to which member countries are committed. Our future depends on it.