

UN event seeks civil society's participation in achieving disarmament goals



Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyotaka Akasaka

4 September 2009 – The United Nations hopes to boost the participation of civil society in reaching disarmament goals, with the world body's annual **conference** on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) set to kick off next week in Mexico City.

This year's gathering, entitled "For Peace and Development: Disarm Now," will take place "at a time when the cost and dangers of nuclear weapons are mounting," Kiyotaka Akasaka, Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information, told reporters in New York today.

Global military spending last year, he pointed out, reached \$1.5 trillion, the equivalent of \$200 for each person alive today. "This is untenable at a time when 1 billion people live on one dollar or less a day."

Disarmament goals are very broad, encompassing not only the total elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, but also limiting conventional arms, preventing the illicit trade in small arms, ridding the world of landmines and many other targets, Sergio Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said at the same briefing.

He noted that there is "growing public awareness of the burdens and risks of large investments in weapons, especially the most deadly ones," with thousands of nuclear weapons capable of wiping out entire cities remaining on high alert across the globe.

"We believe that NGOs and civil society in general have a vital role to play in alleviating these dangers," Mr. Duarte said, adding that the upcoming event "will provide participants with a very visible forum to convey their own ideas about how these challenges can be met."

Some 1,400 delegates, from over 70 countries and representing more than 350 NGOs, are expected to attend the 9-11 September conference, which will be addressed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jody Williams and Mayor of Hiroshima Tadayoshi Akiba are also among those who will take part in the meeting, which is being held outside of New York for the second time in its 62-year history.

Last year, the conference was held at the headquarters of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) in Paris, France.

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