

A Global Problem, A Global Response

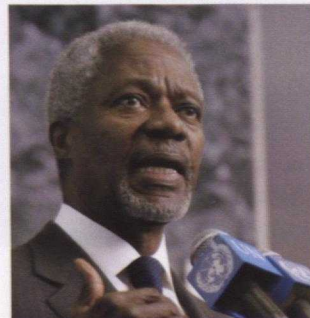
The International Threat

More than 15 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the problems posed by the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) produced and stockpiled during the Cold War remain a serious threat to global security. The coordinated attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, demonstrated just how well organized and financed terrorist networks had become and how vulnerable the world would be if WMD were to fall into terrorist hands. The vast stockpiles of such materials, the randomness and scale of subsequent attacks against civilian populations, and the growing sophistication of terrorist organizations in the 21st century have confirmed the urgency of properly securing and disposing of WMD stocks.

This is a complex and daunting task. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia became the central storage point for vast quantities of WMD and related destructive and dangerous materials. These include:

- approximately 40,000 tonnes of chemical weapons (CW);
- large stockpiles of fissile materials, including highly enriched uranium (HEU) and weapons-grade plutonium (the key ingredients of nuclear weapons); and
- decommissioned nuclear submarines with spent nuclear fuel on board.

As well, tens of thousands of former weapons scientists in the region lost a major source of income as they became unemployed or underemployed. The marketable expertise of these scientists and the difficult economic prospects facing many of them made them highly vulnerable to offers from terrorist groups or states of proliferation concern. Even a relatively small number of experts willing to pass on WMD expertise to the wrong people could seriously impact global security.



Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations

We live in a world of excess hazardous materials and abundant technological know-how, in which some terrorists clearly state their intention to inflict catastrophic casualties.

Were such an attack to occur, it would not only cause widespread death and destruction, but would stagger the world economy and thrust tens of millions of people into dire poverty.

—Secretary-General Kofi Annan's keynote address to the Closing Plenary of the International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security – "A Global Strategy for Fighting Terrorism" Madrid, Spain, 10 March 2005