Statement by

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Check against delivery
Thank you Chair,

Ireland aligns itself fully with the statement delivered by Mexico on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition. Ireland is working with Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa in order to step beyond the rhetoric of nuclear disarmament and join with others to help put in place the structures to achieve it. I would just add the following comments in a national capacity.

On behalf of Austria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, Slovenia, Switzerland I have the honour to introduce L.21, a resolution on “Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations”. The draft Resolution requests the Secretary General to forward his report on the views expressed by Member States in writing to the Secretary General in accordance with last year’s resolution to the Conference on Disarmament and to the Disarmament Commission. It puts the topic of taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament on the agenda of the 70th Session of the General Assembly, when the Assembly will have the opportunity to take stock of the efforts in the year ahead of us in relation to multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations and consider its options. The sponsors thank delegations for their constructive engagement and hope that we have been able to reflect the points made during consultations this month.

Next year, States Parties to the NPT will review the status of implementation of that Treaty for a ninth time. We will also set out where we would like to see the Treaty in 2020, fifty years after it entered into force. We will reserve judgement on whether we believe the 2010 Review Conference was a success until next year. For Ireland, implementation of the NPT’s non-proliferation and peaceful uses agendas continues to function quite well, with several structures in place to support and promote both. We fully support those objectives. The Treaty’s disarmament agenda has however fared less well, to put it mildly.

Since the NPT was indefinitely extended in 1995, the record on implementing disarmament obligations would seem to be as follows: the thirteen practical steps of 2000 remain almost completely unimplemented; the 2005 Review Conference did not achieve any agreed outcome; the extent to which the 2010 Conference may next year be judged a success has been put into doubt – again to put it mildly – by the fact that a number of the nuclear weapon states have informed us that they have reached their minimum levels of nuclear deterrence and cannot disarm further. There is also the fact that all of them are engaged in nuclear weapon modernisation and replacement programmes with time frames extending several decades into the future. This seems distinctly at odds with the commitments given in the thirteen practical steps and the 2010 Action Plan, or with repeated assurances of commitment to achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons.

As regards prospects for next year, some states and observers have already begun to ask, in light of past disarmament failures and current international political complications, what the outcome to the 2015 Review Conference might look like, or even if there will be an agreed outcome, given the levels of, by now, acute frustration among the non-weapon-states at decades of failure and neglect on nuclear disarmament.
The 2010 Action Plan expires in six months’ time and it cannot in our judgement be simply rolled over as if nothing has happened. If next year’s RevCon fails on any significant level, it will be the latest episode in an abysmal record of underachievement and underperformance on multilateral nuclear disarmament since a decision was taken to extend the NPT twenty years ago, a decision which was itself taken on the basis that we, the States Parties, had failed to implement its disarmament objectives within the Treaty’s originally intended twenty-five year lifespan. How many failures can a Treaty be expected to withstand?

Even one of the key elements in the package of agreements to extend the NPT – the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East – remains unimplemented. This is despite the subsequent reaffirmations of that Resolution in 2000 and 2010, despite the agreement on practical next steps reached in 2010, which Ireland is very pleased to have helped broker, and despite the unstinting efforts of Under-Secretary of State Jakko Laajava of Finland to take forward those next steps, efforts which Ireland fully supports and commends.

In short, our record of implementing nuclear disarmament obligations is so poor that questions must soon be asked about the seriousness of our collective commitment to Article VI, to the NPT and to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

We have, and do, welcome bilateral reductions in nuclear arsenals as and when they do occur, even if these are insufficient in our view. However, it is not correct to say, as is sometimes asserted, that the significant reduction in nuclear weapons numbers since the height of the Cold War is evidence that Article VI is being implemented, in spirit if not to the letter. This is of course not accurate. Article VI does not call for "reductions"; it calls for an effective multilateral framework for the achievement of an end to the nuclear arms race at an early date, and for nuclear disarmament.

Article VI is a treaty obligation upon all NPT States, not just the nuclear-weapon states. When a framework is in place, it will be for the nuclear-weapon-states to enter into a verifiable and irreversible process of disarmament within that framework. Only they can disarm, but it is for all states to pursue disarmament. Until we put in place the framework, we all stand accused of failing to implement our NPT obligations. What we have instead is what might be called a place-holder for disarmament, effectively telling us to "insert effective measures for nuclear disarmament here."

No disarmament treaty can possibly function effectively on these terms. Could the Chemical Weapons Convention ever have arrived at a point where it has all but eliminated an entire category of vicious, inhumane weapons if it had not set out a framework of clearly defined prohibitions and obligations, a functioning verification system and multilateral decision-making organs to oversee the process of disarmament? Could the recent destruction of Syrian chemical weapons have been dealt with so resolutely and decisively, and so quickly, if Article 1 of the Chemical Weapons Convention had contained nothing more than a request for States to pursue negotiations in good faith towards effective measures for chemical weapons destruction? We believe not.
This raises an even more troubling question. Does our apparent willingness to go along with a status quo that does not envisage nuclear weapons disarmament in the near, medium or even long term – a status quo, in fact that is arranged such that there can be no functioning treaty basis for multilateral nuclear disarmament – while at the same time we utterly, and correctly, reject chemical weapons – does this in some way suggest that collectively we view nuclear weapons as somehow more “necessary” or “legitimate” or “justifiable” than chemical weapons or, for that matter, biological weapons?

This is most certainly not Ireland’s position. Previously, let us recall, several states wielded chemical weapons, presumably as their ultimate credible deterrent. That does not make chemical weapons any more respectable today, tomorrow or, indeed, yesterday. They are now rightly held up as the object of revulsion, as illegitimate weapons of war. So, why not nuclear weapons? Is it more respectable to retain the capacity to kill civilians on a large scale by incineration and radiation than by nerve agents? There is no logic to this argument.

We are also told the “conditions are not yet in place” for nuclear disarmament. This dangerous narrative is, we would argue, an indirect invitation to proliferate nuclear weapons. Because, if the conditions are not in place for giving them up, then surely they are not in place for continuing to forego them? If one commitment under the NPT can be put into abeyance simply because of, we are told, “concerns regarding the strategic context”, can other commitments not similarly be put into abeyance? Every state on earth has a strategic context. And the NPT most certainly does not create a monopoly over nuclear weapons for a chosen few.

We do not accept the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Nor do we accept that nuclear weapons kept the world safe during the Cold War or at any other time since 1945. The many wars and other skirmishes that have happened since 1945 which often involved one or more nuclear weapons possessors, directly or indirectly, show that adversaries were not in the event deterred.

The recent reframing of the debate around nuclear weapons on terms which give due prominence to the humanitarian impacts of these devices has provided new clarity in collective international thinking about what they mean for all of us. The Cold War may have gone away, but we now know that the risks associated with the weapons themselves have not gone away; that the lack of adequate international response capacity to cope with their effects, as documented by UNIDIR in its research publication “An Illusion of Safety”, has not gone away; and that the horrendous consequences of any detonation have not gone away either. In fact, the risks and consequences are greater than we realised. The risks associated with nuclear weapons, about which new research has emerged, particularly in the UK and US, put front and centre all Governments’ duty of care to their citizens, which in turn exists alongside their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty. States are entitled to take prudent steps to reduce and remove those risks: they are in fact both duty-bound and, we would suggest, treaty-bound to do so by complying with obligations under Article VI.
We commend and express appreciation to Austria for hosting in Vienna a third conference to enable states to examine further the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons. We would also make the point that this conference will be the first Humanitarian Impact conference to take place within the European Union. Ireland will of course attend and play an active role at the conference, just as we encourage all states to accept the open and inclusive invitation.

The question is sometimes put: what is the true motivation or hidden agenda behind the humanitarian consequences initiative. The answer, as far as Ireland is concerned, is quite simple. Our support for the humanitarian initiative is solely and exclusively aimed at supporting fulfilment of the obligations freely entered into under Article VI of the NPT.

The High Representative on Disarmament Affairs has recently referred to the emerging clarity in international thinking about nuclear disarmament as “a swerve.” It is a good description of the shift in direction and pace that we have witnessed within the present NPT review cycle. The swerve has been a long time coming. But, as years of neglect have left the NPT trundling towards a cliff, it is perhaps a good thing that we are swerving. The weapons states are not yet part of the swerve, and we regret that. They have so far decided not to engage with recent initiatives that hold potential for new thinking and new progress towards nuclear disarmament, but we strongly hope they will move to reassess the balance of risk associated with nuclear weapons. The humanitarian discussion has made it clear that the overwhelming majority of UN and NPT members are extremely concerned about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and that they no longer want to sit idly by while the framework of effective measures for nuclear disarmament, which they are treaty-bound to put in place, stands neglected.

Earlier this year, the New Agenda Coalition presented a paper to the NPT Preparatory Committee setting out options for a framework of effective measures and building on an earlier paper presented by Egypt to the Open Ended Working Group in August 2013. The options included a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, a Comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Convention, a framework arrangement of mutually supporting instruments to achieve the same ends, and a hybrid model of the above. Each of these options must be discussed and tested fully for its suitability as a potential framework of effective measures to achieve nuclear disarmament required by Article VI. We are very grateful indeed to our NAC partner New Zealand for arranging a conference last Friday, at which Professor Treasa Dunworth presented a creditable, accessible and helpful analysis of these options from an international legal perspective, which we believe adds greatly to the discourse on this matter.

Civil society, which has again taken such a leading role in bringing fresh thinking to this discussion, should be invited to become actively involved in all related discussions, including in the Conference on Disarmament, where until now insufficient attention has been paid to its valuable contribution. At the same time, we need and would value the engagement of the nuclear-weapon-states in a process which they are already obliged to pursue in good faith, along with the rest of us, from the moment they signed and ratified the NPT. We all assumed that obligation voluntarily and it is time now, almost half a century later, to act upon it.