ICAN Statement

UN Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

Reducing the risk of nuclear weapon detonations

Delivered by Pia Devoto
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I speak on behalf of Seguridad Humana en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (SEHLAC), a partner organization of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. The alarming evidence presented today and at the previous session of the Open-ended Working Group indicates that the risk of a nuclear weapon detonation – whether by accident or design – is increasing.

We believe that the heightened tensions among nuclear-armed States and their allies in recent years make progress towards nuclear disarmament all the more important and urgent. The current security environment, rather than being an excuse for continued inaction, must be a stimulus for action.

At the February session, the discussion on agenda item 5(b) focused on measures that nuclear-armed States should pursue. Regrettably, however, those States chose not to participate in that session, and they are absent again today. We believe that it would be beneficial to focus now on the important role of non-nuclear-weapon States in reducing the risk of nuclear weapon detonations. This dimension was under-explored at the February session.

We propose that the Open-ended Working Group recommend to the UN General Assembly that non-nuclear-weapon States with nuclear weapons deployed on their territory take measures to reduce the risk of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional detonations.

Moreover, we urge these States to answer the following questions: Have there been any recent security breaches at the facilities where nuclear weapons are deployed on their territory? What would be the potential humanitarian consequences of an attack on the facilities at which the nuclear weapons are deployed? What is the risk that such an attack would result in a nuclear detonation or the theft of the nuclear weapons? Are the nuclear weapons at these facilities ever transported along public roads and, if so, does that heighten the risk of a nuclear detonation? What safeguards are in place to prevent an accidental, mistaken or unauthorized launch?
We commend for your consideration NGO Working Paper 8, submitted by Grupo de Práticas em Direitos Humanos e Direito Internacional, a member of the SEHLAC network, titled “Increasing transparency, reducing risk and raising awareness: the role of non-nuclear-weapon States”. As a partner organization of ICAN, SEHLAC is committed to the realization of a nuclear weapon ban treaty. We consider the pursuit of non-legal measures to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon detonations as complementary to this objective.