Open-ended Working Group 2016-05-02, Session on risk reduction measures

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Mr. Chairman,

It is good to see you back in the chair again. Thank you for your diligent work! You have my delegation’s full support and we look forward to working closely with you during this session to move us forward in our work to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world. Your synthesis paper, which you have drafted in your personal capacity, as well as the many important working papers that have been submitted by delegations and NGO:s, provide a good basis for our discussions.

I would also like to thank Dr. Patricia Lewis for her excellent and important presentation this morning. It included many thought-provoking proposals that should be considered further.

We look forward to the presentation by General James Cartwright, Chair of the Global Zero Commission on nuclear risk reduction, next Thursday. Let me in this context flag that a side event with Global Zero will take place next Tuesday, May 10 at lunch-time. We hope you all will join us there.

Another concrete risk reduction measure which we hope will be discussed further is the proposal to ban nuclear-capable cruise missiles which my delegation flagged in the February session and had hoped to see included in your synthesis paper. We will present a working paper on this issue next week.

Statement on behalf of the De-alerting group (Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland and Sweden) in the Open-Ended Working Group on taking forward nuclear disarmament negotiations

Mr. Chairman,

I now have the honour to take the floor on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland and my own country Sweden, the De-alerting group, on the issue of decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

Since 2007, in both the UNGA and in the review process of the NPT, we have called on countries with nuclear weapons to take practical steps to address the significant number of nuclear weapons that still remain on high alert. Such calls have not presented de-alerting as an alternative to nuclear disarmament or as a step that makes the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons more palatable. Rather, de-alerting has been and continues to be
presented as a constructive transitional measure that must be pursued alongside efforts to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons.

The contribution that reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons can make to nuclear disarmament has been widely recognized. It is for instance firmly anchored in the NPT process, both as a commitment in the Thirteen Practical Steps of 2000 and in Action 5 of the 2010 Action Plan. It is also a key element in risk reduction and can contribute to diminishing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in military and security concepts, doctrines and policies.

Despite this recognition and the efforts of many to highlight the necessity and benefits of de-alerting, we remain deeply concerned that hundreds of nuclear missiles estimated to be carrying roughly 1,800 warheads are ready to be launched within minutes. This concern is further increased by the low level of transparency that characterizes this issue in general and by recent developments that may in fact lead to increased alert levels.

Mr. Chairman,

A wide range of possible practical steps have been discussed among experts and by commissions, including technical measures to reduce readiness or to store warheads separately from delivery systems. In our Working Paper on De-alerting (doc nr A/AC.286/WP.18) submitted to this Open-ended Working Group, we have outlined in further detail the background on this issue and the security and risk implications of the high alert levels.

In the WP, we also propose that the OEWG adopt a number of recommendations. These include:

- Acknowledge that agreed concrete measures to reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems would increase human and international security and represent an interim step towards nuclear disarmament as well as an effective measure to mitigate some of the risks associated with nuclear weapons.
- That States possessing nuclear weapons share information on their alert status and plans for de-alerting within the context of the NPT Review Process or other multilateral bodies.
- That the USA and the Russian Federation conclude an agreement to eliminate launch-on-warning from their operational settings and carry out a phased stand down of strategic forces on high alert.

We look forward to discussions and adoption of recommendations on this important matter.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman