Open-Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

Introduction by the Chair of Final Report
Friday 5 August 2016

General Statement by Ireland

Chairman,

Thank you for that very clear and comprehensive presentation of the “zero draft” of your Final Report. In keeping with the ethos of your approach from the outset, we believe that this draft represents a fair, inclusive and balanced representation of the work of this Open Ended Working Group. I would like to thank you and your team for all your hard work and dedication to this task, including over the summer break.

I have no doubt that it has been a challenge, to fairly reflect the work of this Group, while at the same time producing a report that is focused and succinct. We understand that much of the elements under discussion have had to be compressed into Annex 1. An impressive series of Working Papers have also been produced, by States and by our Civil Society partners, as reflected in
Annex 2. It is clear that a great deal of important and valuable discussion and debate has taken place this year here in Geneva, which would be impossible to capture in any narrative summary but which no doubt will continue to have profound and lasting impact, long after our concluding sessions here.

This OEWG has been an encouraging experience. We have been especially pleased and interested to hear from voices which are not often or usually heard in disarmament fora. Ireland has always believed that the full range of opinion needed to be heard on this issue and we supported your inclusive approach. We share your regret at the decision of the Nuclear Weapons States and states that possess nuclear weapons, not to participate in this UN-mandated process.

We have been inspired and informed by the moving personal statements of a number of speakers at this OEWG. These narratives are an important reminder of the humanity and human purpose at the heart of our work here. This is not an academic exercise or a debate taking place in a vacuum. There are real and lasting impacts involved here. We also welcome the excellent gender balance which has been a real role model for international engagement on nuclear disarmament, in terms of panellists and participants. Ireland looks forward to presenting further findings on the important issue of gender and disarmament at First Committee this autumn.

We note that your draft Final Report correctly reflects that our work here is very much in support of, and not in conflict with, the rest of the disarmament machinery and architecture. Indeed, we are here because of the overwhelming wish to reinforce the NPT and to see Article VI implemented in full, as originally intended. It is the lack of any significant progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament commitments which has created the need for this Working Group.
This has never been more urgent and our NPT commitments have never been more important, given the grave risks to humanity from any nuclear detonation, by accident or on purpose, as well as the impossibility of any meaningful humanitarian response, of which we have heard in even starker detail in our meetings here. In this regard, we pay tribute to the role of civil society, experts and academics, all of whom continue to inform our work and raise awareness of the significance and importance of the issues which we are facing.

There is no doubt about the gravity of the current situation. To quote our former Foreign Minister Frank Aitken speaking of the dangers of superficial talks about disarmament - “if we are to save ourselves, we need to make great efforts and sacrifices. To brace ourselves for those efforts and sacrifices, we need to be clearly conscious of our mortal danger. Talks that tend to obscure that saving consciousness may have fatal effects”. That was almost 60 years ago and his words continue to ring true to this day.

The tense international security situation and the threat from non-state actors make it even more essential and urgent that we remove nuclear weapons from the equation. There can be no conditions which are made safer by the toxic addition of nuclear weapons into the mix. Indeed, as Ireland’s Working Paper set out, and which we are pleased to see reflected in the Final Report, a whole range of global challenges are inextricably linked with progress on nuclear disarmament and our failure to make progress on the nuclear issue puts all of our other laudable goals at risk.

Chairman,

We support your draft Report and in the interests of making good progress on its adoption, we would make at this time two suggestions for consideration.
Firstly, we think it would be important for the Report to reflect that all participants support the range of effective measures set out in paragraphs 33 and 34, but that simply repeating our commitments to these measures is no longer enough. Indeed, all States parties to the NPT are already committed to them. Therefore, these measures are not just contained within any one approach and it is not a question of making a choice between these and other approaches or recommendations. Ireland’s commitment to these measures remains as consistent and as strong as ever and we would not wish this to be in any doubt. But we can and should do more to make progress.

We also believe that, in addition to the references to the international security situation and national security doctrines in paragraph 24, it would be important to include some balancing and contextual references to the many compelling and informed arguments made about collective human security, about the risks posed by increasing modernisation, about the potential access to nuclear material and cyber threats by non-state actors and the worrying reduction in the norm around threat of use and what this means for non-proliferation.

Chairman,

We welcome the respectful, open and interactive nature of our discussions here to date and look forward to continuing in the same spirit as we agree the Final Report and recommendations.

We recall our undertaking in the UN Resolution which established this OEWG in which we agreed to make our best endeavours to reach general agreement. We are confident that a consensus outcome is both desirable and possible on the adoption of this Final Report. We stand ready to support you in this endeavour.

Thank you