The plenary meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

Statement of the Polish Delegation

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Let me thank to gen. James Cartwright and Paul Ingram for their interesting introductory words, characterised by quite a bit of realism, pragmatic approach and respect for different opinion.

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to underline that we, as all states presented here, share a desire of having world free of nuclear weapon and we would like to underline our commitment to cooperate in order to achieve an ultimate goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, we need to stress at the same time, that the prompt implementation of a potential legal measure banning nuclear weapons would not guarantee in any way the sustainability of safe and peaceful world.

This is much more complex and demanding task.

Currently, the nuclear weapons, regardless of our assessment of its humanitarian aspects, play a significant role in preserving stable and predictable security environment, as well as strategic balance, which results in lack of a global conflict for almost seventy years.

And again, it does not mean that its deterrent function is not replaceable. However, if we are aiming at deleting a nuclear weapon from the security horizon, we should have, at the same moment, ready to use proposal of a new security measures being a part of systemic solutions, guaranteeing peaceful coexistence in both, global and regional dimensions.

People does not need nuclear and any other sophisticated weapon to kill each other. The past recent decades have proven that hundreds thousands or even millions of human beings lost their lives in a very conventional wars and armed conflicts. It has happened in Africa, in Europe and right now we can observe it in Syria or Ukraine.
Both World Wars, especially the First one, are very good examples of a temptation to act in a lack of stable and predictable security system which contains the core element of deterrence. In mind of the leaders starting these wars, they never was considered to be a global, so long and so devastating. They believed be able to achieve quick and decisive gains and victories, without escalation, and with casualties only on adversary side. We know they was profoundly wrong.

Having in mind how complex and tense situation was during the Cold War, and what war’s plans was prepared by both sides, we could say, that only the consciousness that any aggression would resulted in immediate escalation and then, that in such situation there is no possibility to achieve any gain, allowed not to end up in the real catastrophe. That was deterrence role to be played.

Someone could argue that current situation is completely different. Well, not really, and not for all of us, especially in last years. There are still states possessing nuclear weapons, who reserve the right to the first use, transmit threatening messages against neighbouring countries, exercise the snap move of their nuclear forces towards other countries’ borders and are openly violating international law and its international obligations.

We differ here on how to achieve a world in without nuclear weapons, because we have not the same threat perception. Even if we agree on multiple humanitarian consequences of a single nuclear detonation, they are not the same for all of us, which was clearly showed during February session by some panellist. As we don’t face equally the same threats - we have different security concerns, and different ways to deter potential aggressor from undertake any belligerent action in order to protect our territories and populations. That is our duty.

I could pose the questions – how many of us have neighbours openly exercising nuclear attack on your capitals? concentrating the big military forces on your borders without any warning? And consistently, since some years, dismantling multilateral arms control system, which was giving to entire regions predictability, confidence and security?

I’ve heard very often that our situation is unjustly privileged because we rely on nuclear deterrence capability of our allies. Having in mind what I already said about our constant threat and strategic reality. Do you really think we are privileged? Really?

Just try to make a mental exercise and please, put your countries in strategic and geographic place where we are currently? Do you really would like to live in the shadow of such threat as we do?

I don’t see this as privilege.

We currently rely on nuclear capabilities of our allies not because we want to, but because we have to. Our presence here is the best prove that we would like to change it. But not risking the safety and security of our countries and its populations.

Let’s take that there will be an unilateral abolishment of nuclear weapons on our side. What make you think that the other side, which over-relies on its nuclear forces, which enjoys support of its population for continued nuclear stance, which is openly violating international law and norms, will follow us in this endeavour?
Any unbalance, which could make think someone that he could gain advantage, is a threat, a danger provoking catastrophe. That’s our historical experience, that fortunately, most of states present here are missing. Last century two big wars devastated our countries and populations, because of such miscalculations. 
So please don’t ignore reality even if it is not concerning you directly. The security concerns are not a dissuasive tactics as some statements are saying – they are real, and not take them into account, is not only ignoring reality, but could bring result contrary to the ours wishes.

Mr. Chairman

Let me refer to yesterday Dr. Ritchie presentation, which was warmly received in this room. One of the interesting thoughts presented by dr. Ritchie, and judging by consecutive interventions, broadly shared by many representatives in this room, was the idea that by establishing a prohibition we could change not only the reality, but also our perception, approach and acceptance or not acceptance of some social phenomenon. This believe we could find not only in interventions presented during our discussion but also in some working papers: “The history has taught us, a key element for the elimination of scourges created by humanity has been their prohibition.”
Well, the history is rather showing us that creation of norms is not less important than creation of condition in which these norms could be universally implemented.
Could we say, that despite universal condemnation being present almost 90 years, uncountable international conferences on this issue and many international legal instruments condemning the war and use of force, the war disappeared from the earth and will never occur? We all know that this is not true. The General Treaty of Renunciation of War from 1928, known as a Briand-Kellogg Pact – by the way, still in force - is a perfect example of that.
So, how could you be so sure that prohibition by the immediate Single Ban treaty will fulfil this task?

The other, equally warmly received by many in this room, conclusion from Dr. Ritchie’s analysis was much more interesting, because it was concerning the NPT future. He was proving there is a tough and simple dichotomy: either we have the NPT with its art. 6 provisions, which are causing such frustration because they seems to legitimize the nuclear weapons, or we have the immediate Single Ban treaty, prohibiting and delegitimizing the nuclear weapons, but at the same time weakening, and as consequence, dismantling all NPT system. So, the question is quiet clear what we are choosing: either the NPT system, which is the cornerstone of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, with almost universal coverage;
Or unknown, new immediate Single Ban treaty, supposed to change mentality, but with unknown efficiency and, that for sure, without participation of any nuclear weapons possessor, but at the same time destroying the NPT system. We have no doubts what we are choosing. And you? Did you think well?

Mr. Chairman,

Some of our interlocutors seems to believe that only by provoking crisis we could go forward and agree some new, concrete measures to abolish nuclear weapons. We have even heard brave declaration of readiness to bear with consequences of such crisis. But they don’t tell as how they want to control such crisis and who will pay the price, if this will outcome in casualties and deterioration of international security situation. We don’t share such believe. This is not a game for us. There is something higher at stake – our lives and our future.
And again, let me highlight our continue commitment towards word free of nuclear weapons and repeat that, if we are aiming at deleting a nuclear weapons from the security horizon, we should have, at the same moment, ready to use proposal of a new security measures being part of systemic solutions, guaranteeing peaceful coexistence in both, global and regional dimensions. And as it was said by our panellist, we all should start open, fair and truly inclusive discussion as soon as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.