Joint Statement – Open-Ended Working Group – 22Feb16

Mr. Chair,

As this is the first time I speak in this forum, I would like to congratulate you on having formally assumed your duties. I appreciate that you have undertaken a challenging task in the days and weeks ahead in guiding our discussions. I wish to assure you of our full support for your efforts.

Mr. Chair,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of: Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and my own country, Canada.

Our countries had a range of views on the original resolution that led to the creation of this Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG). Nonetheless, we share with all states a concern about the future of humanity in the face of nuclear weapons, a conviction that nuclear proliferation needs to be immediately addressed, a recognition that progress on nuclear disarmament has been intermittent in recent years, and a belief that the existing disarmament machinery faces both internal and external challenges which seriously impede its effectiveness. For these reasons, we chose to participate in this group and to engage with all delegations, and civil society, in a dialogue on ways to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. We intend to contribute constructively, through discussion and working papers, to the overall work of this group and to its final report.

We appreciate that, for some states, the results of the 2013 OEWG were not what was hoped. This was not, from our perspective, a fault in either the structure or membership of the group, rather it reflected the reality that significant differences exist among states on the nature, scope and pace of any new initiatives to advance nuclear disarmament. One major point of divergence is that, while we all agree on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon’s use, some states, such as our own, believe that to achieve nuclear disarmament requires a balance between the ultimate goal of removing all such weapons, and the risk that their unilateral elimination would be destabilizing and harmful to both our national security and to international security more broadly.

These observations are factual, and not meant to be obstructionist. We intend to work with other delegations to try to identify realistic and practical recommendations for nuclear disarmament over the course of our meetings. We wish to ensure an understanding of our views, even as we accept that not all countries will agree with them. Ultimately, we believe that the final OEWG report will need to capture this reality, if it seeks to accurately convey the possibilities and constraints to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament.
Mr. Chair,

You met with many delegations in the lead-up to these meetings to explain your objectives for the working group and the principles that would guide you. We recall your undertaking to facilitate open discussion and your belief that for the final report to have the weight and credibility you hoped for, it would need to present the entirety of the views expressed during the various meetings.

As we embark on our deliberations, we are conscious that one of the challenges we constantly face when talking about disarmament is a dearth of trust. Too often we question the motives of others in pursuing our mutual goal of nuclear disarmament. We therefore wish to make it clear to you, and to all delegations in this room, that we are here in the sincere belief that we are striving for the same end - to make progress on nuclear disarmament and identify steps leading towards a world without nuclear weapons. We are aware that not all delegations will share the same view on what we consider best solutions, and that we start from different places when it comes to the security dimensions of this discussion. We trust, however, that our exchanges will be frank and respectful; that we will strive for the broadest possible agreement on the issues; and that the final report will reflect all of our discussions and perspectives.

Thank you Mr. Chair.