Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the organizational meeting on 28 January 2016, I stated my preliminary ideas and intentions concerning the structuring of our work.

In particular, I advised on the following schedule of the meetings:

• Eight plenary meetings during this current week of 22 February, namely two plenary session per day today and on February 25 and 26 and one afternoon session per day tomorrow and on Wednesday (February 23 and 24) when the CD plenary takes place as well as the regional group meetings.

• Sixteen plenary meetings are scheduled for 2 to 4 May and 9 to 13 May. Please note that as Thursday, 5 May is an official holiday for Geneva (Ascension Day), at this stage no formal meetings for both Thursday and Friday, 5 and 6 May have been planned.

• Finally, the remaining three days (six meetings) have been tentatively scheduled for the week of 22 August, but remain subject to further consultations depending on the progress the group will make.

Over the past several weeks, I have engaged in intensive consultations with the purpose of hearing from you what are your expectations and ideas on the way this Group should work and implement its mandate, as well as on any other relevant matter.

Based on these consultations I have prepared and circulated an indicative timetable for the work this week, contained in document A/AC.286/WP.1/Rev.1, as well as two brief concept notes, contained in A/AC.286/WP.2/Rev.1 and WP.3/Rev.1 on the panels that I propose to take place under the two main topics of our agenda: legal issues and other measures.

As seen from the indicative timetable, my intentions for this week are as follows:

• Immediately after concluding with procedural issues, I will invite two eminent speakers to brief us on where we stand. They are:

  • Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gomez of Costa Rica who will brief us on the results of the 2013 OEWG to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons which took place in Geneva in 2013. Incidentally, Ambassador Manuel Dengo of Costa Rica, who chaired of the 2013 OEWG, has sent his greetings and wishes us success.
• Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gomez will be followed by Ambassador Tim Caughley, Senior Researcher at UNIDIR and former permanent representative of New Zealand, as well as former Director of UNODA Geneva, who will provide an update on the developments in the field of nuclear disarmament since 2013.

• After that, we will have some time for an exchange of views.

• In the afternoon, as well as tomorrow and on Wednesday afternoon, we will address agenda item 5.a. “Concrete effective legal measures, legal provisions and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons”.

• I have invited three panellists, namely:
  • Ms. Gro Nystuen, Senior Partner, International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI);
  • Ms. Rebecca Johnson, Director, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, London; and
  • Ms. Kathleen Lawand, Head of Arms Unit, Legal Division, International Committee of the Red Cross.

  I hope that their presentations will kick-start an interactive discussion which should help us identify all key legal issues related to nuclear disarmament thus shaping our work in May.

To better structure and facilitate the debate, I have also prepared a few guiding questions which are contained in working paper A/AC.286/WP.2/Rev.1. These questions, however, are not exhaustive and should not be seen as limiting in any way the discussion.

Please feel free to raise and address any issue which you consider falls under the mandate of this group. I strongly encourage you to actively participate in this discussion and engage in an interactive dialogue and brainstorming on how to address the existing challenges with the view of developing concrete proposals and recommendations on the way forward to multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, as per our mandate.

The usefulness of our debate and the quality of the final outcome of this group will depend very much on our ability to think out of the box and take a fresh and balanced look at what are the elements that should constitute nuclear disarmament and a nuclear weapons free world notwithstanding which of the different approaches (or paths) to the elimination of nuclear weapons is taken.

Agenda item 5.b. “Recommendations on other measures that could contribute to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations” will be taken on Thursday and Friday, as indicated in the indicative programme.

• Agenda item 5. b. (i) “Transparency measures related to the risks associated with existing nuclear weapons” will be discussed on Thursday morning.

• Item 5. b. (ii) “Measures to reduce and eliminate the risk of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional nuclear weapon detonations” will be addressed on Thursday afternoon.

• Item 5. b. (iii) “Additional measures to increase awareness and understanding of the complexity of and interrelationship between the wide range of
humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear detonation” is scheduled for Friday morning.

• Last, but not least, the issue of any “Other measures” could be addressed on Friday afternoon.

• The last hour or so before the end of this February meeting has been reserved to wrap-up the session and to discuss the way ahead.

As stated, the May meetings of this group will focus on the specific ideas and proposals identified during this first week of discussions. I would invite all delegations, in addition to the debate, to submit working or food-for-thought papers with specific ideas and proposals. To fulfil our mandate, we need a comprehensive approach and understanding of the variety of issues and the challenges that have to be addressed.

All ideas and proposals expressed during the session or presented in the papers will be summarized, as feasible, in a background paper that will hopefully serve as the basis for the group’s deliberations in May.

The first draft of the final report of the group to the General Assembly will be tabled as soon as feasible after the meeting in May. My intention is to do so before the July summer break. We will then schedule the remaining conference meeting time for August in a way that will facilitate the consideration and smooth adoption of the final report.

Kindly note that this calendar is only an indicative schedule of the activities and will be adjusted depending on the progress made by the open-ended working group and taking into consideration other relevant factors, including the work of the CD.

Before concluding with the procedural issues, a few words on working methods.

In my view, for a body like this working group, meeting for a very limited time-span, the most efficient working framework would be a flexible working structure. I intend to preside over the February meeting myself, but in the future, I intend to invite a few Friends of the Chair to assist me in this endeavour. If necessary, I may also make use of other flexible working methods to focus on specific recommendations before considering them at the plenary.

On the procedural framework, I would like to remind you that as per its mandate and the established practice this group will use the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations General Assembly, applied mutatis mutandis, in light of the provisions of resolution 70/33. These Rules are available in all languages as official document A/520/Rev.17 at the group’s website at http://www.unog.ch/oewg-ndn.

The mandate of the group which was already referred to at the beginning of this meeting is straightforward. We shall submit a report on our work and agreed recommendations to the General Assembly for its consideration and assessment of the progress made.

It is my firm intention to do everything possible to try to accommodate any idea and proposal and agree on a report and set of recommendations acceptable to all. In doing so I will rely on you cooperation and support.

Another issue is that of the character of our proceedings. Pursuant to rule 60 of the Rules of Procedure, we should meet in public, except if otherwise decided. This is an open-ended group and by definition its meetings should remain public. Given the considerable interest in the topic of nuclear disarmament, I expect active contribution by all.
Given the open-ended character of this working group and in order to make our work as inclusive as possible, I am also considering how best to brief our New York colleagues on the progress made by the group and to also invite them to contribute to our work, especially through the presentation of papers.

As per our mandate and the established practice, civil society and the academia should also participate and contribute to our work and I am pleased to welcome the organizations and institutions which have registered for this meeting. The list containing the names of these organizations and institutions was circulated last week by the secretariat for your information and action.

One additional point on organization of work refers to the official documentation. We are entitled to full interpretation in all UN languages for our plenary meetings. However, the number of documents to which this group is entitled and that could be translated is limited to only a few, hence all working papers will only be issued in the language of submission.

Finally, I intend to use quite extensively informal consultations. My doors are open and I take this opportunity to encourage you all to contact me whenever you feel there is an issue to be discussed.

Thank you.