

Open Ended Working Group on Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations

**Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the
Conference on Disarmament and Disarmament Ambassador
at large**

Geneva, 22 February 2016

Thank you Mr President,

Allow me first to congratulate you on your election as chair of this Open Ended Working Group. At both the organizational meeting and in informal consultations you have repeatedly underlined that your goal is to strive for consensus. This will not be an easy task given the wide array of views on nuclear disarmament and the hardened tone of the debate. In consultations you have started the search for common ground, both with the countries present in this room as well as with the countries that choose not to participate. We highly commend you for your transparency and openness. We also believe that we are in excellent hands to conclude this Working Group indeed with a consensus outcome. Let me therefore assure you that you can count on the full support of my delegation.

Mr President,

The Netherlands abstained on resolution 70/33, which established this Open Ended Working Group. The main reasons for our abstention were unresolved differences on the mandate and the rules of procedure. We think this Open Ended Working Group would have profited from the participation of those states possessing nuclear weapons. In our view their participation would have been an important added value compared to the OEWG process in 2013.

Even though we abstained on the resolution, we consider it important to participate in this Working Group. The Netherlands wants to support effective and realistic measures that can bring us closer to our common goal of global zero. We hope this Open Ended Working Group can do just that. We therefore intend to participate actively in this Working Group by submitting working papers and contributing to the discussions.

Another reason we think it is important to actively participate in the work of this Group is that in the last couple of years the debate on nuclear disarmament has polarized. This was clear at the NPT revcon and at the last edition of the First Committee. We therefore believe we need to talk. We need to start a serious dialogue on a realistic and common way forward for nuclear disarmament, including on multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Mr. President,

Realism also implies that that security-related concerns cannot be ignored as is claimed by some. Past experiences with arms control and disarmament have taught us that considerations of the current geopolitical situation must be part of any future measures, steps, elements or building blocks, legal or otherwise on nuclear disarmament, if these are to sort any meaningful effect.

That is why we would like to see the crucial importance of considerations related to international peace, security and stability in the context of nuclear disarmament reflected in the final report. Together with some other states we are planning to submit a working paper on this issue.

Mr President,

The effectiveness of any measure on nuclear disarmament, whether it is legally binding or not, will ultimately depend on the willingness of those states that possess nuclear weapons to implement it. This means that we need to continue to involve those states as much as we can. We realize they chose themselves not to participate in this Working Group. But only by making them in some way part of our discussions here or to involve them in the outcome of this Working Group we can realistically move forward on nuclear disarmament. This Working Group could identify suggestions for effective measures that will engage nuclear weapon states to take further action towards nuclear disarmament.

You have indicated before, Mr President, that it is indeed your intention to stay in dialogue with the nuclear weapons possessor states during the meetings of the Working Group. You have our full support for that.

Mr President,

One final word on a 'ban' of nuclear weapons. In the lead up to this Working Group some have made the case that these meetings would be the start of negotiations of a 'ban' on nuclear weapons.

As we have said on several occasions in the CD, First Committee and during the meetings of the Open Ended Working Group in 2013, the Netherlands is not against a 'ban'. We see it as a final element towards a world without nuclear weapons, when nuclear weapons do no longer fulfill a function in the security of states.

It is clear that we have not reached this stage yet and that starting negotiations on a 'ban' would therefore be premature.

However, we would be open to discuss what a world without nuclear weapons should look like and what elements, legal or otherwise, we would need when we reach that stage.

Thank you.