Statement in the Open Ended Working Group, February 2016

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Mr Chairman,

Let me first congratulate you on your appointment and assure you of my delegation’s full support. We look forward to working closely with you during this and upcoming sessions to help ensure that our deliberations are productive and take us forward in ways that have broad support and can make a real difference in our efforts to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the panelists in Monday’s session for their substantive presentations as well as UNIDIR and ILPI for their useful briefing paper. This paper will help my government in our further deliberations and when we continue to develop our national position on these issues in Stockholm.

Sweden is supportive of the OEWG process – indeed, we were one of the initiators of it – and of the need to dedicate specific time to identify and further elaborate on legal measures to achieve and maintain a nuclear weapon free world. The humanitarian initiative continues to lay the foundation for our perspective. The catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons on humans and on the environment are well documented. The risk that these weapons could be used by accident, miscalculation or design or that non-state actors could acquire these weapons is greater in times of uncertainty and heightened tensions. Today’s security situation makes nuclear disarmament and the strengthening of the rule of law in this area even more important. Unfortunately, the current situation has also made progress more difficult.

Sweden would be supportive of any legal effective measure that would make a difference and it will be important for us in the months to come to weigh the pros and cons of the different approaches in light of this notion. The next step for my government will be to discuss these issues in the National Delegation on International Law and Disarmament, which is an advisory board to the Foreign Minister, composed of representatives from the government, parliament, relevant authorities and institutions, and civil society as well as academic experts in international law and disarmament.

The OEWG is an integral part of the overall disarmament machinery. Proposed effective legal measures are compatible with the NPT, indeed they are ways to implement Article VI of this Treaty in the same way as other instruments help implement the non-proliferation provisions of the Treaty. We regret that countries that possess nuclear weapons are not present here this week, but hope and expect them to join us here in May, to advance fulfilment of their nuclear disarmament obligations.

Sweden is also supportive of many of the effective measures that have been put on the table in this session by Australia on behalf of 18 countries. These measures include increasing transparency, reducing
the risk including through de-alerting, reducing further the arsenals including non-strategic and stockpiled nuclear weapons, reducing the role of NW in security doctrines, a CTBT in force, commencing FMT negotiations, developing verification capabilities, commencing a follow-up agreement to New Start between the US and Russia as proposed by President Obama in Berlin in 2013, and strengthening and creating new NWFZs. We don’t see any contradiction between pursuing these actions, many of which have been agreed by consensus in consecutive NPT Review Conferences, and the pursuit of further effective legal measures. Indeed, there is much common ground between a framework approach and a building block approach, such as a nuclear weapons convention or a prohibition of e.g. the use, acquisition, possession or transfer.

However, let me underline that it is of utmost importance that actions are not conditioned since this would go against legal and political commitments made in the NPT framework.

Risk reduction measures are of particular importance in the current tense security environment. Sweden supports the work conducted and the measures proposed by the global think tank Global Zero to reduce risks among nuclear armed States. We look forward to the panel on risk reduction in tomorrow’s session and hope that also representatives of Global Zero will be invited to speak at the May session. Other new and creative proposals on the table are also worthy of discussion including for example the proposal by former US senior officials William Perry and Andy Weber to ban nuclear capable cruise missiles.

Mr Chairman,

It would be important to have an open discussion about nuclear weapons and security and to try to understand each other’s different perspectives and security concerns. Some countries believe that nuclear weapons are their only option to ultimately deter a belligerent and threatening neighbor. Large groups of countries have instead found their security in the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, some of them located in between countries that possess nuclear weapons. Some countries believe that deterrence has helped preserve the peace. Other countries are concerned about the disastrous effects if deterrence fails and a spiral of action and reaction brings us to the brink of nuclear weapons use.

While understanding these different views, my Government does not believe that regional and global security is served through the continued possession and modernization of nuclear arsenals and is very concerned about such developments in the world of today. We are also very concerned about threats to use nuclear weapons; such threats are unacceptable. Because of their disastrous nature and effects, and their use as political weapons and symbols of might, nuclear weapons in all its aspects affect us all. One country’s claim to security through nuclear weapons, means another country’s insecurity and is problematic for non-proliferation efforts. Regional security concerns thought to be mitigated through the reliance on nuclear weapons don’t only affect that region negatively but also global security. In my government’s view a sustainable peace cannot be built with nuclear weapons and this makes the work we conduct here more important than ever.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.