I would like to join others in thanking the chair for the leadership of this meeting, and for the spirit of open discussion.

In 1948, like the first UN General Assembly, the World Council of Churches’ first Assembly made a strong denunciation of atomic weapons. Churches from every region joined in declaring that war with atomic weapons is “a sin against God” – religious vocabulary for something that is inherently evil, a *deontological* threat.

In the same resolution the churches also noted a peculiar *consequence* of such weaponry—that they destroy the basis on which law itself exists.

From this, two comments:

First, what does it mean to destroy the basis on which law exists? A bomb – God forbid - on London that destroys the Houses of Parliament, #10 Downing Street and the British Library? That is one answer. But surely it means something more.

On what basis does law exist? Common standards, shared interests, mutual obligations, legitimate expectations, universal values and good faith are some of the things that come to mind.

Are these the characteristics of existing nuclear agreements? Have these prerequisites of law taken root within the nuclear regime? Perhaps here and there. But generally, it would seem, what has flourished is rather different: double standards, exclusive interests, unequal obligations and dangerous expectations. Good faith seems to wither on the vine.

One way to understand nuclear history is as a history of wear and tear and damage to that very base on which law is built. Nuclear weapons appear to have obstructed the development of law at its root, especially any legal measure effective enough to control them. Kofi Annan’s comment to us about the unacceptable status quo comes to mind.

What is more, the obstacles to the making of good law are so strong this damage is done regardless of whether the weapons are actually used.
After 70 years the missing ingredient in nuclear disarmament is the still most basic of laws – an explicit, universal, legally binding prohibition of nuclear weapons attained and maintained through multilateral negotiations that are open to all states and block-able by none.

A related, second point: In 1983, appalled by the arms race, the churches called for “an international legal instrument that would outlaw as a crime against humanity the possession as well as the use of nuclear weapons”.

This suggests an important attribute of “effective legal measures”: The Nurnberg War Crimes Tribunal worked from the premise that every act has an author, every transgression has a transgressor. The premise highlights another lesson from nuclear history—the enormous gap between state power and individual responsibility.

We have seen that gap narrowed in recent years in other fields, in cases brought to The Hague. Effective legal measures for the elimination of nuclear weapons will have to help bridge the gap between state power and individual responsibility. The nuclear accountability gap is substantial. Every nation has a stake in ensuring it is closed.

Here too an explicit prohibition against nuclear weapons is the most relevant and robust remedy. It is the steel I-beam strong enough to span the legal gap and on which other law can be built.

Perhaps comments would be helpful on whether nuclear arms threaten the basis of law and whether a ban is an equitable approach to repairing one fractured aspect of law in this field, accountability.

Thank you.

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