Remarks by Thomas Nash, Article 36, during the NGO presentations to the NPT
UNHQ, New York, Tuesday 29 April 2014

Thank you Reiko for sharing your experiences with us today. They are extremely moving and powerful. I hope we can do justice to you and to all victims of nuclear weapons in our advocacy. I hope that states will do justice to you by working to outlaw and eliminate nuclear weapons.

I'm pleased to see a reasonably good turnout of delegates in the room, thank you for not treating the NGO segment as an optional extra. We are keen to have as much interaction as possible, so please do ask for the floor at any time.

I was reflecting on the general debate this morning and it occurred to me that if you knew nothing about nuclear weapons, and came to listen to the speakers in this room, you could walk in at pretty much any moment and you would think that these weapons are a very bad thing and that we should get rid of them.

This is a good starting point. We need to remember that when we feel downhearted about progress on eliminating nuclear weapons! Of course, after that, it gets more difficult. There can be some bruising exchanges on what we should be doing to achieve this goal.

Since we are here in the UN, I thought we should consider the UN Charter, which, right up there in Article 1, talks about developing “friendly relations among nations”. This notion of friendship is very important. In good friendships, we challenge our friends to do the right thing, even when it might be very challenging. We have seen this with the action of the Marshall Islands in filing a lawsuit against the nuclear-armed states for failing to fulfill their disarmament obligations under article VI of the NPT. We can also see it in the NAC working paper on article VI, which might be challenging reading for some. But we should remember that these initiatives are undertaken amongst and between friends.

So, as your friends, we intend to challenge you government delegates a bit today. To do so, we have gathered a selection of speakers representing different organisations as well as youth, parliamentarians, mayors. First, though, we are going to try to do something a bit more interactive. There were a number of ideas of how we could shake things up, do things differently and, in the end we decided to… have a panel discussion.

Gaukhar: What are your reactions to the General Debate this week? Do you think we have had a meaningful critique of progress on the Action Plan in relation to disarmament?

Gaukhar: There have been a lot of meetings on nuclear weapons since the last PrepCom: HLM, OEWG, Nayarit, NPDI, “P5” meetings. Where do you see most scope for progress?

John: How do you think the recent evidence presented in Oslo and Nayarit on impacts and risk of nuclear weapon detonations is changing the way we think about nuclear disarmament?

John: Do you think the humanitarian initiative is also changing our understanding of decades-old concepts like nuclear deterrence?

Ray: The idea of states beginning a process to develop a treaty banning nuclear weapons is the subject of a lot of discussion now, why is it generating such interest?

Ray: There have been strong reactions to the ban treaty idea; can you explain the intent of this approach and how it supports the disarmament obligations of the NPT?

Pia: Non-nuclear-armed states seemed more assertive and empowered in Oslo and Nayarit. Is there impatience to go beyond discussions and start a political process? For a ban?

Pia: You took part in the processes for the 2008 CCM and the ATT last year. Can states and organisations draw on these processes to make progress on nuclear weapons?
John: How do you think the new lawsuit launched by the Marshall Islands will influence the landscape on nuclear weapons?

Thank you to the panellists for those contributions. Now we turn to the remaining speakers.

First of all we have a lawyer. Within the law we have clear rules and prohibitions as well as varying interpretations of rules. For example in this building there is a clear prohibition on NGO delegates stepping foot on the second floor. But there is also varying interpretations as to whether NGO delegates may step foot on the floor of this room. Sometimes we are allowed to; sometimes we are not.

In any case, one can think of the law as a social conversation, not a static body. It should evolve to match our moral and social values. It needs to evolve on nuclear weapons, I think it is already and it will continue to do so until their elimination. Mr Phon van der Beisen, Attorney at Law in Amsterdam and co-president of IALANA, you have the floor.

Thank you Phon. I now have the honour to introduce the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Mayor Matsui Kazumi of Hiroshima, followed by Mayor Tomihisa Taue of Nagasaki.

Thank you to both of you. It is an honour to have you here and I hope that the delegates in this room will listen to the words you have spoken today and act upon them.

Next up is Jeremy Corbyn, a member of the House of Commons in the UK parliament for the past 30 years and here with CND and PNND.

Thank you Jeremy. Noel Stott, of the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa will now deliver a statement on behalf of the NGO New Agenda Coalition.

Thank you Noel.

We now have Ambassador Mohamed Shaker from the Egyptian Council on Foreign Relations.

Thank you Ambassador.

The last speaker will be Alexandra Arce of IPPNW Costa Rica, speaking on behalf of the Ban All Nukes Generation.

Thank you Alex.

I will just make few brief closing remarks. Nuclear disarmament is hard. It’s a big question, one of the biggest. But things can and do change in the world. Long held assumptions change. These changes often seem inconceivable until they happen.

We know from progress in other areas that hard work, strong partnerships and open-mindedness can bring about change. We also know that it is individuals that make change; individuals that have their own agency, sometimes acting beyond their official brief.

The question is: do we want to change things, fundamentally? Do we believe that we can? If the answer is yes, then the humanitarian initiative has opened up a genuine opportunity to move towards a ban treaty.

Within ICAN, we think we can see a credible plan emerging to ban nuclear weapons. It will start to build its own gravity and that will get stronger and stronger. Of course it will take courage to grasp this opportunity, especially if you look behind you and see that some of your friends are not coming. But sometimes, a few have to go first. And when you do that, others will follow. We in civil society will be right behind you. Indeed, you won’t be able to get rid of us. So please, recognise this opportunity and grasp it.