Statement by

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at the

Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to
the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Cluster 1

New York, 2 May 2014

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Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Cluster I

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Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Ireland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition on Wednesday. To this I would add the following points in a national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

It is a very regrettable fact that almost half a century after it entered into force, not one weapon from within the five nuclear stockpiles recognised by the NPT has been disarmed under arrangements set out by the Treaty. There are no arrangements for nuclear disarmament set out by the NPT. All reductions to date, welcome though they undoubtedly have been, have been part of a parallel process of disarmament, completely voluntary and entirely outside of the treaty. This has exposed the Treaty to criticism that it is not operating to its full potential, although Ireland’s support for the NPT is undiminished.

As the New Agenda Coalition pointed out in its statement on nuclear disarmament, we believe that no treaty which is founded upon a bargain can withstand serious and lasting damage if there is a failure to honour that bargain and especially if this failure persists over a lengthy and until now indefinite period.

Because of the time and prevailing political environment in which the NPT was negotiated, the Treaty was established as a provisionally incomplete instrument which, by countering the proliferation of nuclear weapons, would allow the existing weapons states a small measure of time and space to disarm their arsenals as soon as they could. The Treaty took care to provide a basis for complete nuclear disarmament, however, through its Article VI. This was to manifest itself in the first instance in good faith negotiations towards “effective measures” to oversee the multilateral process of nuclear disarmament.

That was forty four years ago, almost twice the originally intended life span of the Treaty. No attempt has been made in the meantime to pursue the “effective measures.” Can it any longer be claimed with credibility that NPT disarmament obligations are being honoured in full?
It has been suggested that “the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons” are not yet in place and that we should pursue these before we can pursue nuclear disarmament. Ireland says that the conditions were put in place on the 5th of March 1970 when the NPT entered into force. We do not see any conditionality or exceptions written into the Treaty’s disarmament obligations. It is not an à la carte menu.

It is not logical to assert that certain states should be permitted to retain nuclear weapons on the basis of what they say are legitimate security concerns while simultaneously claiming that others cannot cite the same concerns as a reason for seeking the weapons. So, almost fifty years after entry into force, we must ask ourselves: Is the NPT to become a blueprint for wholesale weaponisation or one for achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons?

On the 17th of October 1958, when introducing the first of our resolutions on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in the General Assembly, Ireland’s then foreign minister, Frank Aiken, made clear what Ireland’s ambitions were for what would become the NPT. He said:

“We have no wish to conceal the fact that we regard the proposed temporary measure of nuclear restriction as only a step towards a permanent ban on the further dissemination of nuclear weapons – permanent in the sense that it should remain in being until the total abolition of nuclear weapons renders it superfluous.”

"Temporary.... until the total abolition of nuclear weapons renders it superfluous."

This, I would suggest, was the ambition of all non-nuclear-weapons states when they entered into the NPT bargain. Failure to honour this bargain now puts the Treaty under increasing and intolerable strain and has led to considerable frustration in the wider international community. It is now combining with mounting concern about the risks associated with nuclear weapons that are being described in new research presented by the Royal Institute of International Affairs in the United Kingdom and in other publications. The Chatham House research, which was presented at the United Nations for the first time earlier this week, suggests the incidence of near misses involving nuclear weapons and of unprofessional practices on the part of relevant personnel is greater than previously thought. This research adds to already existing concerns on the part of citizens and policy makers everywhere about the ever-present risk of accident, systems failure or the actions of non-state actors.

The completion and implementation of a framework for disarmament as demanded by Article VI would, in addition to facilitating full implementation of the NPT, simultaneously improve conditions for a world without nuclear weapons by providing the benefits of clarity, equity and multilateral oversight to the disarmament process. It would protect the process from the influence of external political crises and, by separating external political factors from the multilateral disarmament track, at the same time prevent nuclear weapons possession from a factor exacerbating political crises.

Mr. Chairman,

In its working paper on Article VI, the options which the New Agenda Coalition has suggested as offering prospects for achieving this include: a Nuclear Weapons Convention, a
Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty, a looser framework arrangement of mutually reinforcing instruments, or a hybrid of any or all of the above. All should be discussed.

The NAC has taken care not to prescribe any one outcome over the others. That is a matter for States to discuss and decide. In an earlier NAC working paper, submitted by Egypt to the Open Ended Working Group last year, the NAC identified the essential constituent elements of any effective measures for disarmament under Article VI, without which these measures could not achieve their own objective. By identifying what we need, States can then decide how to frame it. When it is framed, States can decide what to call it. The key point is that we must begin the discussions immediately.

It has been suggested that prohibiting nuclear weapons does not guarantee that they will ever be eliminated. I would suggest, however, that refusing even to countenance the possibility of prohibition will almost certainly guarantee that these weapons will never be eliminated. Is that our vision for Article VI of the NPT? Is that our definition of implementation? In Ireland’s case, the answer to both questions is a clear “No.”

It is not evident to us how NPT review process mechanisms, as structured at present, can accommodate inclusive and urgent discussions on options for meeting Article VI’s demand for effective measures for disarmament. It is clear to us that the discussions must take place. For far too long, we have allowed Article VI of the NPT to stand neglected, and this can no longer be viewed as “business as usual.” We cannot simply keep agreeing plans of action which have no prospect of being implemented. We watched the thirteen practical steps of 2000 come and go. The extent to which the 2010 Action Plan can be said to have been implemented will not become clear until next year’s Review Conference. We will assess its implementation then. We must be clear, however, that we will not, under any circumstances, countenance a simple roll-over of the 2010 Action Plan at next year’s review conference. To do so would inflict even further damage on the NPT as a credible driver of disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

The humanitarian consequences discussion has revealed the known risks and consequences of continued collective inaction. These risks and consequences now raise stark policy choices for all states. They are not easy choices, but they are unavoidable.

On the cenotaph at Hiroshima the epitaph reads: “Please rest in peace, the error shall not be repeated.” That, Mr. Chairman, is a matter which rests in our hands and our hands alone.

Thank you.