Statement by

Mr. Breifne O’Reilly
Director for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

at the

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

General Debate

New York, 30 April 2014

Check against delivery
Thank you Mr. Chairman,

As this is the first time I am taking the floor, may I congratulate you on your election as Chair of this important third Preparatory Committee meeting and assure you of Ireland's full support for the duration of this session.

It was Ireland's privilege on Monday to deliver the statement on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition. To this I would add the following comments.

Mr. Chairman,

The NPT has always existed in a state of jeopardy, since it entered into force forty four years ago. The Treaty was founded on a compact or agreement that non nuclear weapon states would do without nuclear weapons in exchange, among other things, for the assurance of nuclear disarmament “at an early date”, to manifest itself in the first instance in good faith negotiations towards "effective measures" for the achievement and oversight of same.

Today, the Treaty continues to face serious proliferation challenges. Chief among these is the declared nuclear weapons programme of the DPRK, a state that purports to have withdrawn from the Treaty and now seeks to justify its pursuit of nuclear weapons in terms depressingly familiar to the deterrence arguments advanced by the NPT nuclear weapons states. Ireland unequivocally rejects the argument that nuclear deterrence justifies either the retention or acquisition of these inhumane weapons.

We welcome recent progress in the continuing efforts aimed at resolving open questions regarding Iranian nuclear programme. We encourage all sides to keep working with determination to resolve these open questions, thereby strengthening the NPT.

We support the efforts of the IAEA to resolve proliferation concerns regarding Syria.

Mr. Chairman,

It must be recognised that in the absence of any progress in elaborating a framework of effective measures for delivery of the NPT's disarmament agenda, as specifically demanded of all states by Article VI, the Treaty's third pillar, concerning the benefits of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, has increasingly become a weight-bearing pillar in that it seems to represent the only benefit currently on offer to non-nuclear weapon states. While Ireland has chosen not to include nuclear power in its energy mix, we nevertheless recognise the right of all NPT State Parties to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under Article IV of the Treaty, subject in all cases to safeguards and the highest standards of safety and security.

Regarding other benefits of nuclear technology, Ireland believes that the IAEA’s Peaceful Uses Initiative has a key role to play in leading the fight against cancer, as it does in a range of other human health related areas and, indeed, in other fields. Given the importance of the IAEA’s work in this area, and in accordance with Action 55 of the 2010 Action Plan, Ireland made an extra-budgetary voluntary contribution to the IAEA’s Peaceful Uses Initiative in 2013, specifically with regard to the IAEA’s Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy.
Having said this, Mr. Chairman, we must recognise that the NPT’s fitness for purpose as a
driver of global non-proliferation efforts and as a guarantor of peaceful uses of nuclear
energy is by now seriously compromised by decades of failure to honour the bargain at the
heart of the Treaty. This has served to heap pressure upon pressure on a Treaty now exposed
to allegations by some that it is inherently discriminatory in that its Conference of States
parties presses the Treaty’s non-proliferation agenda with urgency and vigour, while leaving
unfulfilled the obligation to elaborate effective measures for disarmament.

We reject any suggestion that the NPT is inherently discriminatory, but we would suggest
that any Treaty that is based on a bargain must inevitably suffer damage if there is a failure to
honour the bargain. We must now recognise that our collective dereliction in ensuring that
the NPT’s disarmament framework is even defined, much less implemented, serves only
to put the Treaty in heightened jeopardy today.

Within this NPT review cycle, non-nuclear-weapon states have sought to address the
imbalance at the heart of NPT implementation through a number of initiatives, including: the
High Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament convened last year, which Ireland’s Deputy
Prime Minister and several other senior political figures addressed; the Open Ended Working
Group on Disarmament, which succeeded in agreeing a consensus outcome document under
the able chairmanship of Costa Rica and with the constructive engagement of all participants,
including two non-NPT nuclear weapons possessor states; and the follow up process to the
HLM proposed by the States of the Non Aligned Movement and supported by a majority of
UN Member States, including Ireland.

Perhaps, however, the most important development of this NPT Review Cycle has been that
concerning the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons. Two international conferences - in
Norway and in Mexico - have helped States to develop their understanding of the catastrophic
humanitarian consequences which would flow from a nuclear weapons detonation, regardless
of the circumstances. We now know that these consequences would be far worse and far
longer term even than we had expected.

Evidence presented in Oslo and Nayarit has also pointed up a profound lack of capacity at
any national or international level to respond to the unprecedented levels of human suffering
and death which a detonation would inflict on innocent civilian populations, including
civilian populations in states not party to any conflict. It has shown that we would be unable
on any terms to contain the longer term, trans-boundary, calamitous consequences that would
affect all human life for generations to come.

Perhaps most importantly, the humanitarian discussion has thrown light on the fact that,
regardless of any alleged utility in preventing or containing conflict and despite repeated
assurances of no first use, the peacetime risks associated with the possession and retention of
nuclear weapons are ever present, arguably growing, and significantly higher than we had
understood them to be. We have heard this week, in the margins of this meeting, an excellent
joint presentation on the risk issue, by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London,
and the author Eric Schlosser. As the general public become more aware of the succession of
near misses and unprofessional practices, highlighted in those presentations and in other
recent reports, they will become ever more concerned. Responsible governments are entitled,
if not obliged, to promote and protect the health and welfare of all their citizens.
Mr. Chairman,

States now face stark policy choices that they can no longer avoid. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has been the centrepiece of disarmament and non-proliferation efforts since 1970, but it is incomplete. By its own terms, it demands "effective measures" for disarmament. It demands these effective measures of the states which signed and ratified the treaty. Mr. Chairman, WE are those states.

In its paper on Article VI of the NPT, the New Agenda Coalition calls for discussions by all states on the options available for the effective measures envisaged by Article VI. It is surprising that we should be required to call for these discussions given that they represent an irreducible and unqualified treaty obligation of almost a half century's standing, applying to all NPT states without exception, and particularly given the known risks and consequences of continued collective inaction.

Any of the options suggested in the NAC working paper - including the comprehensive Nuclear Weapons Convention and the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty - offers prospects for fulfilling the objectives of Article VI. We call on all states to engage in all fora to discuss these options to establish effective measures. This is entirely consistent with Article VI of the NPT and with Action 1 of the 2010 Action Plan, neither of which could possibly be clearer in setting out the irreducible obligation upon all NPT States to take this matter forward.

Mr. Chairman,

If the fitness for purpose of the NPT's disarmament framework continues to remain under strain, the Treaty's wider fitness for purpose will be placed under increasing strain to the extent that it will be seen as being built upon a broken promise. States are under an obligation to prevent this, by making good on decades of expressions of political commitment to a world without nuclear weapons and commencing discussions on a framework for achieving this.

Thank you.