Non-Proliferation Treaty – Preparatory Committee 2017

Cluster III Specific issues, 10 May 2017

Statement by Pieter-Henk Schroor, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN Organisations in Vienna
Mr. Chairman,

The Netherlands considers improving the working methods of the NPT review mechanism as a priority of this review cycle.

We do not consider this issue a cosmetic one. Nor does dealing with it in any way distract us from the substantive goals of the NPT. Quite the opposite: improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our working methods will strengthen the NPT by facilitating progress on its implementation.

Many of those who have participated in the NPT review cycle, as representative, observer or scholar, have noted that a number of shortcomings impede the efficiency of the NPT’s review mechanism and, with that, the effectiveness of the treaty itself. These include, but are by no means limited to:

- The fact that the PrepCom does not take any substantive decisions or make any substantive recommendations to the Review Conference, leaving the Review Conferences with a too heavy workload and under too much pressure to solve complicated issues in four weeks.
- There is too much repetition in the review cycle. Discussions are often repeated in all three sessions of the PrepCom and then again in the Review Conference.

To be sure, this is not a new issue. A number of good papers with good ideas have been put forward in previous review cycles. However, improving the working methods of the NPT review mechanism was not accorded a high enough priority. We should remedy that this review cycle. We should start with taking a good look at the work that was done previously and identify where we can move forward.

That also means we must not be afraid to propose to do things differently. Tradition or standing practice are, on their own, not a sufficient reason for leaving things the way they are.

The Netherlands will work with its partners to come up with ideas and recommendations in this review cycle. But we can already work towards greater continuity within the review cycle by establishing strong links and a practice of close cooperation between the different chairs of the meetings. In that context, we would like to express our hope that the chairs of the 2019 PrepCom and the 2020 RevCon will be nominated as early as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

Some delegations raised the issue of article X of the NPT. We are of the view that withdrawal from the NPT by a State Party is an important issue, indeed. It carries risks to non-proliferation and could constitute a threat to
international peace and security. In extremis, withdrawal may turn a non-proliferation problem into an acute nuclear disarmament problem.

Therefore, the Netherlands sees withdrawal by a State Party as a significant political event that should be given proper weight and attention by the remaining NPT States Parties and by the UN Security Council. This is not to say that we deny States Parties the right to withdraw from the Treaty. We fully recognize that every State Party, in exercising its national sovereignty, has the right to withdraw from the Treaty. What we do need, however, is clarity about the procedures and consequences if a State Party decides to withdraw from the NPT. In this regard, more than 10 years after the DPRK withdraw from the NPT, many questions still remain unanswered. These questions relate to issues like the rights and responsibilities of the withdrawing state as well as rights and responsibilities of the Remaining States and the UN Security Council. Moreover, clarity is needed about the role of other relevant international organizations like the IAEA and the CTBTO in the event that a state party notifies of withdrawal, both during the period of notification and after exiting the Treaty. In conclusion, in order to maintain the integrity and universality of the Treaty, we should develop a balanced and holistic approach by which States Parties are being encouraged to remain in the Treaty and are being discouraged to withdraw. Therefore, we strongly believe that article X is an important topic to be discusses during this review process, ideally leading to recommendations on how to deal with this issue as a result of the 2020 Review Conference.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.