Belgium

General Statement

Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference of the Parties
to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

First session, Vienna, 2-12 May 2017

Mr. Chairman,

Let me first congratulate you on assuming the chairmanship of the first Preparatory Committee meeting of the 2020 NPT Review Conference. We commend you and your Government for the thorough preparation of this meeting and for the extensive outreach efforts undertaken, true to the spirit of common purpose, instilled in the Treaty. I can assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation in performing your responsibilities.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union. I wish to add a number of points of particular importance to my delegation.

Mr. Chairman,

As we set out on a new review cycle, we are reminded not only of the goals of the Treaty, but also of the means to achieve them. Are we satisfied with current progress in achieving the objectives of the Treaty? And is our diplomatic process, including the present review cycle, sufficient to move forward?

The answer is nuanced. With regards to non-proliferation, we welcome the continued implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between the E3+3 and Iran. No one should doubt that the normative force of the Non Proliferation Treaty and its nearly universal acceptance helped to trigger this nuclear deal. The benefits of the agreement are shared: Iran can further develop its nuclear programme and the international community rests reassured of its exclusively peaceful nature. The nuclear agreement with Iran bears witness of the strength of multilateral diplomacy, when it is guided by a shared vision of purpose and underpinned by collective action. We underscore the importance of the continued implementation of the nuclear agreement by all sides.

Proliferation risks remain however. North Korea puts us to the test. What policy options are left to deal with a State which continues to seek provocation and which seems impervious to external pressure? The answer does not reside in the lowering of our international standards. We need more cooperation to ensure strict compliance with the UN sanctions regime and to cut off the external financial
sources of the nuclear programme, such as the overseas employment of North Korean workers. We should, however, never cut off the possibility of renewing talks and seeking a negotiated path towards the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of North Korea.

Mr Chairman,

We share the frustration experienced by most States parties at the slow progress on nuclear disarmament. We recall the primary responsibility of the nuclear weapons states, and particularly those with the largest arsenals, to take effective action towards nuclear disarmament, in accordance with Article 6 of the Treaty. It is not for lack of ideas or proposals. The 2010 action plan provides an array of measures to accelerate progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament.

Frustration should however not become our main driver. Success of the NPT has always hinged upon a collective endeavour. Mutual trust and confidence are key to revitalizing the NPT as a force for progress.

As part of its national contribution to the global non-proliferation regime, Belgium has accepted to take up the responsibility of co-coordinator of the Article 14 Conference of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We look forward to working closely with our friends from Iraq and to build upon the work achieved by the current co-coordinators Japan and Kazakhstan. It is our intent to bring entry-into-force of the Treaty nearer through a series of focused demarches and initiatives. More than ever, a clear support for the Treaty, including through a final Statement of the Conference to be held in New York in September, will illustrate the resolve of the international community to uphold the tenets of the global non-proliferation regime.

On a separate track, Belgium will continue its efforts to reinforce the credibility of the verification regime of the CTBT. Through scientific study and innovative technology we will contribute to the goal of avoiding the interference of radioxenon emissions stemming from medical isotope production sites in the measurement data of the International Monitoring System.

Mr Chairman,

No other weapon has the destructive power of a nuclear bomb. This fact not only underscores the need for urgent disarmament, but also the need for a realistic approach. For this reason, Belgium adheres to the “progressive approach”, which sets out a pragmatic path towards a nuclear weapon free world, based on a number of mutually reinforcing building blocks.

Disarmament does not operate in a vacuum. The international security context sets out parameters for what is achievable and what not. More efforts are needed to
reduce regional tensions. At the same time, global distrust should not be sharpened by the expansive modernization of nuclear arsenals, the development of new nuclear capabilities or the non-compliance with existing disarmament treaties.

Mr Chairman,

Transparent, verifiable and irreversible reductions are key to successful, negotiated agreements. Confidence cannot be decreed. We therefore welcome initiatives aimed at increasing our knowledge about the effective verification of nuclear weapons dismantlement. As a member of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, Belgium offers its nuclear expertise to help formulate answers to these technical and methodological challenges. Dedicated work by groups of interested States can generate new ideas and approaches, but these results have to feed into the work carried out by the wider community. We therefore welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 71/67, which acknowledges the importance of effective disarmament verification and invites all UN members States to offer their views.

In the same vein, we hope that the work of the high-level FMCT expert preparatory group will provide a constructive contribution to the efforts to start the negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

Mr Chairman,

Turning over to the third pillar of the NPT, let me reconfirm our belief in safety, security and safeguards as the basic underpinnings of a responsible nuclear programme. The peaceful use of the atom not only serves energy needs, but also contributes to human healthcare worldwide and assists our sustainable development goals. As one of the major producers of medical radioisotopes, we value their indispensable role in cancer diagnosis and therapy.

The Belgian Nuclear Research Centre (SCK-CEN) continues to develop the innovative research infrastructure called MYRRHA with the main objective of providing the research community with a highly performing and versatile installation to carry out material and fuel testing. Particular attention will be given to the transmutation of long-lived radioactive waste. Our research centre also remains an active provider of training services to the IAEA.

Nuclear security has received due attention these last years, notably in the framework of the Nuclear Security Summit process. The work is not over and the IAEA remains central to a strengthened global nuclear security architecture. Belgium has supported this work with a yearly voluntary contribution of 300.000 USD since 2010.

Mr Chairman,
We look forward to meaningful dialogue and a successful outcome of the Preparatory Committee. We are confident that under your able chairmanship we can accomplish this mission.