General Debate

Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Patricia O’Brien
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On behalf of the New Agenda Coalition

at the

2017 Preparatory Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

Vienna, 2 May 2017

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Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of the members of the New Agenda Coalition, namely Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and my own country, Ireland.

The NAC congratulates you on the assumption of your role and we assure you of our full cooperation and support in the discharge of your duties.

This Preparatory Committee marks the beginning of a new review cycle, a process which has been tasked by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference with an ambitious mandate: to look forward as well as back; to evaluate the implementation of undertakings of the NPT States Parties; to identify the areas in which, and the means through which, further progress should be sought in the future; and to address specifically what might be done to strengthen the implementation of the Treaty and to achieve its universality.

The NAC stands ready to support all positive initiatives in implementation of this mandate. As ever, the NAC remains fully committed to the NPT, and we look forward to working with all parties to reinforce and strengthen the Treaty. It is clear to the NAC that, for this objective to be reached, urgent progress is needed on nuclear disarmament. There can be little dispute that implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, where it has occurred at all, has been unacceptably slow. Today, 47 years after the entry into force of the NPT, in the lead-up to the 25th anniversary of its indefinite extension, Article VI, the core of the Treaty’s nuclear disarmament pillar, remains unfulfilled. The NAC cannot accept this pattern of inaction.

In 2000, NPT States Parties agreed on a series of 13 practical steps for the implementation of Article VI, and the nuclear-weapon States made an unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament. This undertaking was reaffirmed in 2010 and complemented by a 64-point Action Plan, as part of which the nuclear-weapon States committed to accelerate concrete progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament. There has been little such progress and the NAC is concerned that the “unequivocal” nature of this undertaking contrasts with the continued reliance on nuclear weapons in security doctrines, ongoing, expensive, modernization of nuclear arsenals and a worrying increase in threats of use of nuclear weapons.

Mr Chairman,

The NAC considers that the current global security situation cannot justify lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. On the contrary, it reinforces the need for urgent action. What is lacking is not the propitious conditions, but political will and determination.

This unsustainable status quo is not due to a lack of understanding of the overwhelming risk posed by nuclear weapons and of their catastrophic and devastating humanitarian consequences. Indeed, these were recognised already in the Preamble of the NPT itself, as well as by the 2010 Review Conference. Since then, the body of expert research and contributions
presented at the three Conferences hosted by the Governments of Norway, Mexico and Austria on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, as well as to the Open Ended Working Groups on Taking Forward Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations in 2013 and 2016, have significantly added to our common knowledge and understanding of the grave impact any nuclear weapon detonation, accidental or deliberate, would have for humanity.

The messages of experts, corroborated by ample evidence, resonate loud and clear: In an increasingly fragile international environment and in light of the vulnerability of nuclear weapons technologies, the probability of a nuclear detonation is growing. There is no adequate humanitarian response capacity to cope with the devastating effects of such a detonation. Furthermore, ionising radiation disproportionately affects women and girl children. In terms of consequences, knowing what we know about the initial impacts and the risks of escalation, it is hard to conceive and misleading to speak of a “limited” or “regional” nuclear strike.

Mr Chairman,

The NAC reiterates that the only effective safeguard against the risk posed by the continued existence of nuclear weapons is their total, irreversible and verifiable elimination. Pending the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, the NAC remains committed to the pursuit of interim measures and continues to believe in the valuable contribution of nuclear weapon free zones to enhancing global and regional peace and security. While we are pleased that the majority of States are parties to such zones, the NAC emphasises the importance of the establishment of nuclear weapon free zones in areas where they do not exist, in particular in the Middle East.

The Resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference provided for the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. The 2010 Review Conference mandated NPT States Parties to convene a conference for the establishment of such a zone; however, efforts to implement this commitment failed in 2012. The 2015 Review Conference failed to reach agreement on an outcome document which would initiate the process to implement the 1995 resolution on the Middle East. The decision to extend the Treaty indefinitely was made possible only through a negotiated package of texts which included, inter alia, the Resolution on the Middle East. The NAC wishes to recall that this Resolution remains valid until fully implemented.

The urgency and importance of achieving the universality of the NPT was reiterated in 2010. In this respect, the NAC urges India, Israel and Pakistan to join the NPT as non-nuclear weapon states promptly and without conditions. Furthermore, we call on the DPRK to verifiably dismantle any nuclear weapons, to return to the NPT without delay and to place all its facilities under comprehensive IAEA verification.

Mr Chairman,
Notwithstanding the special responsibility that lies with the nuclear-weapon States, the implementation of the NPT’s Article VI is a legal obligation binding on all States Parties to pursue in good faith and to bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under effective international control. On this basis, the NAC welcomes the UN Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, which recently successfully concluded its first session in New York. We encourage the widest possible participation in these negotiations and look forward to the second session of the Conference this coming June, and we invite all States to work together to advance the cause of nuclear disarmament in a multilateral context.

The NPT was adopted and indefinitely extended on the basis of a ‘grand bargain’: nuclear-weapon States legally committed themselves to pursuing and achieving nuclear disarmament, in return for which non-nuclear weapon States legally committed themselves not to develop nuclear weapons. The presumption of indefinite possession of nuclear weapons runs counter to the object and purpose of the NPT. We all share a firm commitment to this instrument, which is the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. While a Treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons is an effective legal measure contributing to the implementation of Article VI, its eventual adoption will not excuse States Parties from their many existing obligations and commitments under the NPT. We must uphold and preserve the NPT, and the best way to protect the NPT is to implement it.

To this end, we are hopeful that the present review cycle will signal concrete progress towards compliance with the Treaty’s nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, inter alia by exploring options for strengthening accountability, in particular through enhanced transparency and measurability of their implementation. To this purpose, the NAC has submitted two working papers containing concrete recommendations, which we will introduce during the thematic debate.

We look forward to engaging in open, transparent and substantive discussions with all NPT States Parties during this session of the Preparatory Committee. We must not forget that, despite our differences, we are all here today because we have a common goal: to fully implement the NPT in letter and in spirit. A world without nuclear weapons is more than the ambition of the Treaty’s drafters, more than a dream: it is a clear and binding legal obligation and a collective responsibility, and we must spare no effort to achieve it.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.