Check upon delivery

Statement of the Netherlands
General Debate NPT PrepCom 2017

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I hope you will forgive me for starting by congratulating my colleague Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast on his election as Chairman. It is good to know that this meeting is in your experienced hands, and I wish you the best of luck. The Netherlands’ delegation, of course, fully supports you.

I would like to raise a not wholly unimportant question: why are we here?

This PrepCom comes at a challenging time. We face international tensions that affect the functioning of the NPT. And all this after the previous RevCon failed to reach consensus on a Final Document, depriving us of some much-needed direction. We have to overcome a lack of progress on disarmament. Complicating matters, there exist significant differences of opinion on what such progress should look like.

Thus, it is time we have a serious talk on where we stand and how we can move forward.

Mr. Chairman,

Admittedly, "we need to talk" is not usually a phrase that has very positive connotations. But I take heart in the fact that the NPT arose from the need to overcome a challenge and we have been able to overcome challenges throughout its decades of being in force.

We do this because we have common goals and principles. Nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy are not zero sum: they benefit us all. Moreover, the NPT review cycle is an inclusive process. It provides a platform for discussion, based on binding legal rules, for 191 states. This builds confidence between them.

- For example, the NPT has provided the framework for a diplomatic resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue. This PrepCom should give a strong signal of support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and reflect the need for those involved to continue working toward its implementation.
- At the same time, the DPRK has rejected the NPT and everything that it stands for, leading to a major nuclear crisis on the peninsula. Make no mistake: this is a grave challenge to the non-proliferation regime. We strongly condemn the actions of the DPRK and urge the PrepCom to send a clear, unified message that this is unacceptable based on the norms of the NPT.
- "We need to talk" also applies to disarmament. Where are we now? More importantly, where do we want to go? What does a nuclear weapon free world look like? The review cycle for the NPT, the only instrument obliging its nuclear-armed members to disarm, is the right venue for this discussion. We must try to elaborate what this goal looks like, what we need to achieve it, and where the gaps in our knowledge or capabilities lie. And yes, this includes a discussion on the role of a nuclear weapons ban.

I urge everyone here to keep an open mind on these and other issues. On many, we will have to conclude that we must agree to disagree at this point. That does not mean there is no use in engaging in dialogue. An exchange of viewpoints, with a readiness to listen to others, is always a first step in finding compromises. This PrepCom must be that first step, along the way to 2020.

Mr. Chairman,
I started out by asking the question: *Why are we here?* Clearly, introspection and stock-taking are part of that answer. But the issues at hand are important enough to warrant more ambition than just that.

We have all heard we ‘should not leave everything until the last moment’. In this case, that means not waiting with moving forward until the Review Conference. Instead, where possible, we should all right here and right now be as forward-looking as we can. We must identify positive developments and areas where our positions converge. Then we must discuss how we can build on these for further progress. As these important questions will be discussed more detailed in the clusters, let me mention here just a few significant examples to illustrate how progress may advance.

- The first one is nuclear disarmament verification. Let us be realistic: states are not going to disarm completely unless they *know* others are doing so as well. If we want a world without nuclear weapons, we need an ironclad verification mechanism, that at the same time prevents the transfer of proliferation-sensitive weapons-related information. Right now such a mechanism – or the necessary technology – does not exist. That is why we must move forward with initiatives such as the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV)\(^1\) and the upcoming Group of Governmental Experts.\(^2\)
- Another example relates to a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT)\(^3\), something we have long been striving for. Banning the production of fissile materials for military purposes would cap nuclear arsenals and help put a lid on nuclear arms races. The new high-level process that has been initiated presents an opportunity to make further progress on elements of a treaty to feed into negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament (CD).
- We should also talk about peaceful uses. If the location of this PrepCom did not already remind us of the importance of peaceful nuclear cooperation, the excellent speech by Mr. Amano certainly did. Nuclear energy, in the context of both power and non-power applications, has many benefits for mankind. We must see how such cooperation can further be stimulated.
- We could also make progress in terms of transparency and reporting. We have to build on what we started in the last review cycle. Nuclear weapon states sharing information about their nuclear arsenals and doctrines creates dialogue, both amongst themselves and with NPT non-nuclear weapon states. It increases predictability and therefore stability. This way, increased transparency will help build confidence, trust and can be a stepping stone for further progress on disarmament.
- Finally, we could improve our own working methods. It has often been pointed out that the NPT review cycle may not be the *most* efficient mechanism since the dawn of multilateralism. We have, on previous occasions, talked about how to remedy this, and we should continue to do so in this review cycle.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman,

---

1. IPNDV: Het IPNDV is in 2014 door de VS aangekondigd met een drietal doelstellingen: het vergroten van internationale capaciteit in KWS en niet-KWS op het gebied van de verificatie van nucleaire ontwapening, het vergroten van inzicht en begrip van de uitdagingen die gepaard gaan met verificatie en monitoring van nucleaire ontwapening, en het faciliteren van technische vooruitgang om deze uitdagingen het hoofd te bieden. NL zit samen met VK een van de drie werkgroepen van het IPNDV voor.

2. De AVVN heeft in 2016 bepaald dat in 2018 een Group of Governmental Experts zich zal gaan buigen over de rol van verificatie in ontwapening. Nederland was een van de voortrekkers van deze resolutie.

3. Een FMCT zou de productie van spilbbaar materiaal voor het maken van kernwapens moeten verbieden. Zonder spilbaar materiaal geen kernwapens, dus een FMCT zou voorgoed een einde maken aan de productie van kernwapens. Een FMCT is een onmisbare stap op weg naar een kernwapenvrije wereld. Pakistan houdt het begin van onderhandelingen in de ontwapeningconferentie al 20 jaar tegen; vandaar dat gezocht wordt naar andere wegen om het proces toch levend te houden.
We are here because the NPT stands for multilateralism, for finding joint solutions to shared problems and challenges. Its objectives are universal. So is the imperative to maintain international peace, stability and security, to prevent the threat or use of nuclear weapons. We achieve these goals through working towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and fostering the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. We do this taking fully into account security-related considerations, but let ourselves also be guided by humanitarian imperatives.

We are here because we must address the challenges before us, taking into account our different positions on how to handle them. As our Minister pointed out at the CD last February, multilateralism is of the greatest importance in relation to disarmament. Priorities of NPT member states may differ. So will our opinions on how to effectively implement the NPT. But moving ahead starts with an open and honest dialogue.

And we are here because it is crucial that the NPT keeps moving forward. The NPT is the cornerstone of a regime, the legal foundation of a process, that keeps developing and evolving. We cannot sit back and relax, because we would drift from our goals. After 2015, and events since then, the NPT needs new momentum. This PrepCom is the place to start building it.

Thank you.