IRELAND

Cluster 1 Issues
Statement by

H.E. Ambassador Patricia O’Brien
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations and other international organisations at Geneva

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

Check against delivery
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 was born out of concern at the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament commitments under the NPT. It was also inspired, however, by a firm belief that such progress is possible. The NAC strives to keep the focus on nuclear disarmament commitments, to constantly review this issue through new lenses, and to find new ways to come at challenging issues. Our approach is based not on frustration, but on legal obligations and on the clear evidence of urgency regarding the implementation of those obligations. As we approach our twentieth year as a group, we are more determined than ever that the nuclear disarmament commitments we have all, as States Parties, signed up to, should be implemented without delay.

The overwhelming risk posed by the probability of a nuclear detonation –whether by accident, miscalculation or design – coupled with their catastrophic humanitarian consequences allows no room for complacency. We all share the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. But identifying the path to this goal is not enough – we also have to walk it.

The working papers which we are presenting at the start of this review cycle are very much part of that NAC tradition and focus. Our intention is to stimulate debate and thinking on these issues and we look forward to working with all colleagues here in the interests of genuine progress and in support of the NPT.

Mr Chairman,

In document NPT/CONF.2020/PC.I/WP.9 entitled ‘Taking forward nuclear disarmament’ the NAC reiterates its conviction that the current status quo with regard to nuclear disarmament is unsustainable and in need of urgent change, and makes concrete recommendations to this effect. In doing so the NAC does not lose sight of the key developments over the last review cycle, including those relating to the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the pursuit of legally effective measures for nuclear disarmament. Indeed, the NAC is concerned to ensure that these are not forgotten in the absence of any outcome from the 2015 NPT Review Conference. WP.9 further recalls that all existing obligations and commitments made under the NPT, including Article VI, the decisions and resolution adopted in 1995, the 13 practical steps of 2000, and the detailed 64-point Action Plan in 2010 remain fully applicable and their implementation is more urgent than ever.

A number of NPT States Parties believe that nuclear disarmament can only be achieved in a gradual manner, if and when national and international security conditions so permit. It is regrettable that this approach has so far objectively produced little result in practice.

The NAC believes that international stability and undiminished security for all is the strongest argument in favour of accelerated progress towards achieving a nuclear weapon-free world. Nuclear weapons represent a fundamental threat to collective security and to the future of the planet and of humanity as a whole. We are concerned that continued reliance on these weapons
in military doctrines and as part of an extended deterrence policy, increasing modernization of nuclear arsenals and a worrying increase in threats of use of nuclear weapons may have unintended consequences, such as exacerbating tensions in international relations as well as the risk of nuclear proliferation, thus triggering a vicious cycle.

Mr Chairman,

Accountability is a fundamental aspect of treaty implementation and, in the context of the NPT, was reaffirmed by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference as a central element of the strengthened review process.

Accountability can only be pursued through objective evaluation of the status of implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments during the course of the Treaty’s review cycles. In order to be meaningful, this evaluation requires access to accurate, up to date, complete and comparable information.

The 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences highlighted the importance of the principle of transparency as a confidence-building measure and as a significant contribution to nuclear disarmament. Actions related to transparency are not only central for the credibility of any disarmament measures but also for measuring and ascertaining compliance with the Treaty and with States Parties’ obligations and commitments.

In this context, the nuclear-weapon States have undertaken to submit regular reports on nuclear disarmament measures taken, inter alia, in implementation of Article VI. These states have also undertaken to agree as soon as possible on a standard reporting form or template and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily providing standard information.

While we welcome the fact that the nuclear-weapon States have been providing varying levels of data regarding their national implementation of Article VI, this reporting has not been standardised and is not subject to objective analysis. The absence of sufficient and consistent information has not allowed the NPT review process to objectively assess compliance with nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments. We call on the nuclear-weapon States to provide accurate, up to date, complete and comparable reports on measures taken in implementation of their Treaty obligations and commitments related to nuclear disarmament throughout the review process, starting from the 2018 Preparatory Committee. Transparency on nuclear arsenals and disarmament activities is vital for ensuring accountability for progress towards achieving a nuclear weapon-free world.

Mr Chairman,

The NAC believes that the assessment and evaluation of information would be facilitated by the identification of baselines and by the application of analytical tools. One such tool could be a set of clearly defined, mutually understood and agreed upon criteria or benchmarks which may take the form of targets, indicators and deadlines by which progress (or lack thereof) on the implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments can be measured.
Progress is difficult to claim or evaluate unless it can be measured. It is our view that the determination of agreed benchmarks or other criteria would not only contribute to the objective assessment of compliance, but that it could also help ensure more specific reporting and thus enhance transparency and accountability through measurability, in a manner consistent with the object and purpose of the NPT. Moreover, the existence of such benchmarks or criteria to improve the measurability of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments could act as an incentive for their implementation.

In document NPT/CONF.2020/PC.I/WP.13 entitled ‘Strengthening accountability through enhanced transparency and measurability of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments under the NPT’ the NAC builds on its work from the previous review cycle. The Working Paper highlights the need for enhanced transparency and calls for the commencement of inclusive discussions on options to improve the measurability of the implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments, including through tools such as benchmarks or similar criteria.

We look forward to further discussing these important issues, which we would like to see reflected in the Outcome Document of the 2020 Review Conference.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.