Belgium

Statement on Cluster I issues

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,

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and I will only address a number of points of particular importance to my delegation.

Ten years ago, four distinguished American statesmen argued that the end of the Cold War presented an historic opportunity to build a global consensus for reversing reliance on nuclear weapons. They warned that failure to take urgent action could lead to a new nuclear era that would be more precarious and economically more costly than Cold War deterrence.

Today, as the strategic environment has deteriorated and the tension between major powers has increased, we face some of the same challenges as 10 years ago, such as North Korea’s continuing nuclear and missile build-up. There have also been notable successes. The nuclear deal between the E3+3 and Iran is a win-win agreement allowing for technological development under comprehensive IAEA-monitoring. While there continues to be a risk of nuclear and radiological terrorism, international cooperation to address this challenge has been strengthened.

Yet progress on nuclear disarmament does not meet our expectations. We regret that New START remains the last nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and Russia. As the holders of 90% of the global nuclear arsenal, the United States and Russia retain primary responsibility to move forward on nuclear disarmament. We call on both countries to seek reductions of all types of nuclear weapons, strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed. Other nuclear possessor states need to follow suit and we welcome in this regard the stockpile reduction in Europe. We are however concerned about the expansive modernization of nuclear arsenals in certain states, and in particular the development of new nuclear capabilities which increase the usability of these weapons and elicit new strategic calculations with potential destabilizing effect.

Beyond stockpile reduction, other action needs to be undertaken, such as steps to increase the warning and decision times for the launch of nuclear weapons, thereby reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorized attacks.

No member of the NPT is exempt from the obligations under Article VI. Nuclear weapon states bear the main burden, but non-nuclear weapon states have their own responsibility in fostering the conditions that are conducive to disarmament. Regional security is part of it. An improvement of the overall security environment is necessary to facilitate arms control.
Mr. Chairman,

Belgium wishes to contribute to the objective of a nuclear weapons free world through the progressive approach. This is a gradual process based on mutually reinforcing building blocks. One of the long overdue building blocks is the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty. Indeed, how can we get rid of nuclear weapons if we can’t agree on a universal and legally-binding stop to nuclear testing?

Belgium has accepted to take up the responsibility of co-chair of the Article 14 Conference of the CTBT. It is our intent to bring entry-into-force of the Treaty nearer through a series of focused demarches and initiatives. We will cast our net wide and reach out to a wide public, including parliamentarians and civil society. In our view, everybody is a stakeholder in the Treaty, so everybody can play a role in defending its benefits. We reaffirm our belief that no country should make its accession to the CTBT contingent upon the action of another state. The adhesion to the Treaty of one of the two nuclear heavyweights is testimony to this effect. At the same time, we welcome innovative ideas to make progress, such as a coordinated accession in a region where mutual distrust reigns.

Effective disarmament is also dependent on adequate tools to secure verification. As nuclear weapons are the ultimate weapon of mass destruction, no state can afford a miscalculation about the true intent of another state when signing a nuclear disarmament agreement. Recent experience regarding the possible non-compliance with existing disarmament treaties has further underscored this point. Specialized work is needed to address the technical and methodological challenges related to nuclear disarmament verification. We welcome the dedicated efforts undertaken by groups of interested countries, such as the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament verification, of which my country is a member. Wider interest for the topic is needed and the adoption a General Assembly resolution 71/67 provides the opportunity to all states to submit their views.

Mr Chairman,

While no action can substitute for the commencement of negotiations on a fissile material cut off treaty in the Conference on Disarmament, the establishment of a high-level FMCT preparatory group will allow for substantial preparatory work. The organisation of consultative meetings gives all states the possibility to engage in this effort. This is a rare opportunity this year for the international community, whether or not party to the NPT, whether or not possessor of nuclear weapons, to discuss a concrete step towards nuclear disarmament.

Mr Chairman,

Today, the challenges remain formidable. The lack of progress may be frustrating and the call for alternative pathways may be tempting. However, Belgium continues to favour the NPT as our guide to a world without nuclear weapons. The new review
cycle is an important station on our road and we should use this Preparatory Committee meeting to its best benefit to further our common objective.

Mr Chairman,

A number of States have taken the view that the disarmament agenda is best pushed forward by the immediate negotiation of a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons. Belgium does not share this view and does not participate in these negotiations. While we disagree with other States parties on this issue, we remain ready to cooperate with all stakeholders to jointly further our goal of a world without nuclear weapons. In this respect, we believe it important for all states to maintain their unequivocal attachment to the central role of the NPT and to reaffirm, in this setting and elsewhere, that no other initiative exonerates any state party from its legal obligations under the NPT.

As the four statesmen emphasized ten years ago: we need to turn the goal of a world without nuclear weapons into a joint enterprise. This remains as true now as back then.