Statement by

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Main Committee I

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Ireland’s National Cluster I statement

Mr. Chair,

Ireland associates itself fully with the statement delivered by New Zealand on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition. Ireland is particularly proud to be among the 159 countries who joined together with one voice, delivered by the Foreign Minister of Austria, to clearly state that “it is in the interests of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances.” Our advocacy for a world free of the threat of nuclear weapons is firmly rooted in our belief that there is no circumstance in which the use of a nuclear weapon, or any other weapon of mass destruction, can ever be justified.

Mr. Chair,

We need to remember today the prevailing political environment at the time the NPT was negotiated. The climate at that time meant the Treaty was established as a provisionally incomplete instrument which, while countering the proliferation of nuclear weapons, would allow the existing weapons states a small measure of time and space to disarm their arsenals as soon as they could. The Treaty provided a basis for complete nuclear disarmament, however, through Article VI. This was to manifest itself in good faith negotiations on "effective measures" for an end to the arms race and nuclear disarmament. The reason for the disarmament provisions was that the horror of the nuclear explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, about which we heard again last week from the Hibakusha, was fresh in the mind of the negotiators.

The decision to extend the Treaty indefinitely in 1995 must be seen as a collective recognition that we as States Parties had failed to achieve the disarmament objectives within the original 25 years the Treaty was designed to last. Every 5 years since the indefinite extension, States Parties have gathered at Review Conferences to look forward as well as back. As the distinguished Ambassador of Mexico has said, we non-nuclear weapons states want to be ambitious and constructive at this Review Conference. We want substantive and clear discussions on how to move forward with negotiations provided for in the Treaty and what are the effective measures we should pursue.

If we look back at what has been achieved with regard to nuclear disarmament under the NPT since 1995, the record appears to be the following: the thirteen practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI, which were agreed at the 2000 Review Conference remain almost completely unimplemented; in 2005, the Review Conference could not achieve an agreed outcome. In 2010, the Review Conference agreed, without a vote, 64 actions under the Treaty’s three pillars. This Review Conference will be examining the extent to which the 22 action points, which included concrete steps for the total elimination of nuclear weapons, have been implemented. Once we have collectively made that assessment, then we, as States Parties, must decide what we do next to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons. We all have an obligation under Article VI of the Treaty: there is no opt-out clause; nor is there conditionality, and furthermore the obligation to engage in good faith negotiations has been interpreted by the ICJ as a requirement to bring those negotiations to a conclusion.
Mr. Chair,

Ireland has to ask how we are to get closer to achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons when we hear of programmes to modernise nuclear weapons, some of which are to run for several decades into the future? How are we to reconcile this with the “unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament”? There are voices which tell us that it is in our interests that nuclear weapons are maintained and modernised; that we benefit from the stability they offer the world order. The conflict we see in so many regions today suggest that nuclear weapons have not provided stability. In fact, I firmly believe that if there were a nuclear weapon detonation - the risk of which is as real today as ever - it would completely undermine the stability of the world order, possibly for generations.

Ireland fully acknowledges the very considerable reductions in nuclear arsenals that have taken place and that the number of nuclear weapons is now at its lowest level since the height of the Cold War. However, almost half a century after it entered into force, not one weapon from within the five nuclear stockpiles recognised by the NPT has been eliminated on foot of multilateral negotiations envisaged under Article VI. In fact, there are no arrangements for nuclear disarmament set out in the Treaty. We therefore have to ask where are the effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament which each State Party to this Treaty undertook to pursue back in 1968? In light of the credible research that has emerged on risk and near accidents in several jurisdictions, it is no longer sufficient for us to rely on some kind of grace and favour reductions negotiated bilaterally by the Nuclear Weapons States. All of our citizens have a stake in this.

The UN Secretary General reminded us that “no country disputes the desirability of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world.” Ireland agrees with Secretary General Ban’s remark that “The more we understand about the humanitarian impacts, the more it becomes clear that we must pursue disarmament as an urgent imperative.” If these weapons are judged by the vast majority to be bereft of moral justification and utilitarian value; if they have been shown to have appalling and indiscriminate destructive capacity to which the Hibakusha testify including at this Review Conference; why is there a reluctance to discuss legal pathways to eliminate them, as all States are obliged to do under the Treaty?

Ireland is grateful to the Governments of Norway, Mexico and Austria for their leadership in hosting 3 major international conferences on the humanitarian impact of a nuclear detonation. Given what we now know on this subject, we need to ask ourselves whether we are prepared to acquiesce in a situation where - in one region or another, sooner or later - a nuclear weapon may one day be either used or set off accidentally. Ireland fully agrees with the ICRC that there is a need to fill the legal gap to eliminate nuclear weapons, as provided for in the Pledge adopted by Austria after the Vienna Conference. As President Maurer said, “It is the time to draw legal, political and operational conclusions from what has been learned about those ‘catastrophic humanitarian consequences’ which States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty recognized five years ago.”
The compelling evidence about the devastating impact of nuclear weapons which we have heard at the three international conferences – particularly from the Hibakusha and the survivors of nuclear tests - cannot in our view be ignored. The inability of the international system to respond in any way adequately to a nuclear weapons detonation cannot be ignored. And the research showing the ever-present risks of a nuclear weapon detonation cannot be ignored. All these factors underline the clear and unambiguous obligation upon all States Parties to this Treaty to enter into negotiations leading to effective measures for nuclear disarmament.

Mr. Chair,

Together with our partners in the New Agenda Coalition, we have been examining and analysing what effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament might look like. In 2013, in the Open Ended Working Group to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, Egypt presented a paper on behalf of the NAC elaborating the possible ingredients of a legal instrument to be negotiated between States; in April last year, in the final session of the Preparatory Committee for this Review Conference, Ireland presented WP 18, outlining elements of the various approaches that have been set forth in the public domain as possible legal instruments. And now this year, New Zealand, as NAC Coordinator, has submitted WP 9. The paper highlights the possible legal pathways for pursuing the effective measures for nuclear disarmament mandated by Article VI of the NPT. It is a constructive and cogent document which does not seek to prescribe the particular legal instrument to be pursued by way of discussion between States. However, it is no longer a question of whether these discussions should take place: that after all is a Treaty obligation. Nor is there any doubt in the NAC that there is a need for an agreed legal pathway to achieving nuclear disarmament. Moreover, the cumulative evidence presented at 3 international conferences demands that a start to the discussions on the legal pathways be made now.

We look forward to engaging in a substantive discussion with all States Parties in this Committee on effective measures. All States Parties undertook to negotiate effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament. Not only have we not held those negotiations and brought them to a conclusion as we were enjoined to do by the International Court of Justice: 45 years on, we have not even started. If we don’t start, how can we conclude? And if we don’t start, how can we reach a world without nuclear weapons to which we all aspire.