Belgium

Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons
(8-9 December 2014)

We would like to warmly thank Austria for organizing this conference and for its tireless efforts to make this event as inclusive as possible. The moving testimonies from survivors and the scientific information about the devastating humanitarian consequences of a nuclear detonation have reminded us starkly why we should focus our efforts on preventing the use of nuclear weapons and on promoting the global zero.

Belgium has been participating in the three conferences on this topic starting in Oslo in March 2013. Undoubtedly, here in Vienna, the question looms where this process will finally lead to. In this context we want to underscore the importance of a successful Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty next year. At the Review Conference our goal should be a consensus outcome, with realistic and achievable action points. We all know that a wide variety of complex issues will have to be addressed, and that success is not guaranteed. We should however understand that failure at the Review Conference will not bring us one step closer to nuclear disarmament. It is therefore important that on all topics, pragmatic proposals are made, which have the potential of garnering widespread support. In this respect, we have to acknowledge that nuclear disarmament will not happen in a void, and that both humanitarian and security dimensions have to be taken into consideration.

We have heard voices proposing a global ban on nuclear weapons. Sometimes a reference is made to the conventions on anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. Belgium was closely involved in these initiatives and we would caution against making broad analogies. The very nature of nuclear weapons and their massive destructive power set them apart from other weapons systems. No nuclear weapons state will eliminate its arsenal without firm guarantees. Confidence cannot be decreed. Eliminating these weapons therefore requires a negotiated framework leading to verifiable and irreversible reductions. This will not happen overnight, but needs a gradual and building blocks approach. In short, banning nuclear weapons in itself does not guarantee their elimination.

Instead we should redouble our efforts to achieve the steps needed for effective disarmament. Crucial, in this regard, is our support for the NPT as the cornerstone for the global non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. In our view, progress in achieving the objectives of article VI has been too slow, but we should be wary of unrealistic alternatives, which may undermine the real achievements of the regime and may divert our attention and resources. We regret the current tensions between nuclear weapon states on certain issues, but this should not prevent them from seeking further confidence building measures and reductions of their nuclear arsenals.