Open Ended Working Group on Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations
Comments by Ireland
14 May 2013

Mr. Chairman, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of this Open Ended Working Group and assure of my delegation’s full support. Ambassador Guerreiro of Brazil delivered a statement on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition earlier with which we fully associate ourselves.

Mr. Chairman,

There is a growing sense of frustration in the international community at the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. We share this frustration. The creation of this Working Group and the convening of a High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament by the General Assembly demonstrate a growing momentum to take action on nuclear disarmament.

This format represents an important opportunity for States to explore ways to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. We urge all States to participate actively and to do so creatively, with an open mind.

Mr. Chairman,

The oft-cited deterrence value of nuclear weapons cannot be proven realistically, but it is clear, and has become even clearer recently, that this alleged value is cited as grounds not just for their retention but for their acquisition. While their deterrence effect cannot be judged, the devastating effect of nuclear weapons can.

It is abundantly clear to Ireland, and the vast majority of States who have voluntarily foresworn them, that nuclear weapons pose a threat to humanity. We welcome that fact that some States that have chosen to maintain nuclear weapons acknowledge that they have devastating humanitarian consequences. Thus we are left wondering why these weapons persist and what we can do, collectively, to bring the nuclear weapons age to an end.

Ireland recognises that achieving a world free of nuclear weapons will not be easy but it will certainly not be possible unless we seriously examine what needs to be done to get us to that goal, one that we are all committed to achieving, and to begin working in earnest now.

Over many decades a narrative has developed that a step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament is the only logical approach. When the question is posed what those steps should be, we are told that one step is the next logical step or even starting point, but we are not told what the next step after that should be, or when it could be taken. Perhaps it is time to question the logic of this narrative.
We are told that dismantling nuclear arsenals is a difficult and expensive process. We do not dispute that it will be both complex and expensive, but the vast resources wasted on maintaining, and even modernising, nuclear arsenals could just as easily be spent on their dismantlement if leadership were shown.

These are some of the questions I hope we can explore together in this Working Group.

Mr. Chairman,

Ireland welcomes the themes you have identified for this session of the Open Ended Working Group: taking stock and also aspects, perspectives and challenges regarding nuclear disarmament and multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

It is not for want of effort that we have made little progress toward multilateral nuclear disarmament. This year, we have had the Oslo Conference on humanitarian consequences; the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference; now we have this Open Ended Working Group and later this year the General Assembly High Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament.

My delegation sees this Open Ended Working Group as a catalyst, as a focal point for new ideas, as an opportunity to look at issues in more depth than is possible in other fora.

We should not, *ab initio*, duplicate issues considered elsewhere. Our responsibility is to focus on the words “taking forward” and “multilateral” in relation to nuclear disarmament pathways.

As we move forward, issues such as transparency, the character and evolution and status of nuclear weapon free zones and the Janus interconnection of disarmament and non-proliferation to be considered, conceptually but also in terms of practical implication. It is about, as best we can, “taking forward”.

We need creative thinking and not repetition of known positions. We need a genuine attempt to engage rather than a culture of intervention. I welcome the interactive format you have chosen for our deliberations, with the involvement of academia and civil society. There is no monopoly on wisdom. We welcome these and all inputs.

In this format we are free from the precedents and past history of other rooms in this building. We are free to do our work differently. The General Assembly has tasked us to use this opportunity to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. Let us heed that call, look afresh at the options and come up with proposals for action.

Thank you.