Open-Ended Working Group to Develop Proposals to Take Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations

Comments by New Zealand

15 May 2013

Mr Chairman, allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your assumption of the chair of this working group. The New Zealand delegation will support you fully as you guide us forward in this new venture. We fully subscribe of course to the statement delivered yesterday by the Brazilian Ambassador on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition.

Mr Chairman

This is a working group that meets a need. This is a working group with a purpose. The recent NPT PrepCom held here in Geneva revealed a real and growing sense of frustration at the slow pace of nuclear disarmament. The Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, held in Oslo in early March, illustrated very clearly the strong international concern on that issue. And without our claiming to hold a crystal ball, it does not take a great leap of imagination to predict the serious calls for progress that will be made at the high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament in September this year.

This group exists because the UN’s disarmament machinery, described by Reaching Critical Will as beset by “a culture of stalemate”, cannot meet its mandate, nor respond to the growing pressure for progress on nuclear disarmament.

Our working group has a simple mandate: to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. It allows, entirely properly, for the full participation of all UN Member States and civil society. It is not tied up in rules of procedure that allow the few to dictate to the many, nor is it bound up in the history of positions taken on Treaty language or Review Conference outcomes. It offers a fresh new forum, and an opportunity to think outside the constraints of traditional nuclear disarmament approaches. Importantly, it offers us the opportunity to focus on the substance of nuclear disarmament, not just its process.

I would not wish New Zealand’s position to be misunderstood. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is frequently described – including by New Zealand – as the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation framework. We continue to see it in those terms. But in doing so, we do not consider that it offers us the only opportunity to advance its disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses goals. This point has been amply proven by the many initiatives outside the Treaty that nonetheless
support the NPT's non-proliferation framework. Nuclear disarmament need be no different. Under its Article VI, all NPT States Parties undertake to pursue negotiations in good faith on measures related to nuclear disarmament. It does not specify where we should do so. This working group can help give reality to that undertaking.

Mr Chairman

This working group cannot create of its own accord the political will that is often said to be lacking in taking forward nuclear disarmament. But what it can do is explore how we might create that political will, and indeed whether the problems that are preventing us from moving forward today can be ascribed only to a lack of political will or also to the means we have chosen to reach our goals. We are approaching this task with an open mind, and we call on all other delegations to do likewise.

We welcome your initiative, Mr Chairman, to structure the sessions of the working group in such a way that will allow the most interactive dialogue possible and one with the full and active participation of civil society. As the Secretary-General has said, a world free of nuclear weapons would be a global public good of the highest order. Reaching that goal should not and cannot be the sole preserve of states, but of all of us.

Mr Chairman

New Zealand was pleased to co-sponsor the resolution which has led to the convening of this working group. We did so because we believed, and we continue to believe, that this working group provides us with an important opportunity to live up to our collective commitment to nuclear disarmament. We will be working with you and everyone in this room to seize it.