

**Statement by**  
**His Excellency Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs,**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia,**  
**to the Conference on Disarmament Geneva, 26 February 2019**

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Mr President,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the United Kingdom on assuming the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and express Latvia's full support and cooperation. I praise the outgoing Presidency of Ukraine for its effort in the search of consensus on the Work Program. I would also like to express my appreciation to the UN Secretary-General, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament for their endeavors to facilitate active international discussion on disarmament and non-proliferation matters.

Conference on Disarmament has played a crucial role in championing essential discussions in order to create the global disarmament *acquis*. It is precisely due to the immense work of the Conference and its predecessor bodies, that today we have a number of important treaties at our disposal. This has been possible through a combination of determined diplomatic efforts and overarching political will.

Five years ago in this same place I called for the re-establishment of a climate of trust and confidence among participating states and recapturing the sense of common purpose in the Conference on Disarmament. I sought the truth in Shakespeare's words: "Men at some time are masters of their fates: the fault ... is not in our stars, but in ourselves..." Five years later, the fault is still in us. Procedural maneuvers and lack of political will have kept us from real progress. However, the global challenges have not eased. They cannot be addressed by unilateral actions alone. It is the responsibility of Member States to advance disarmament machinery and break the deadlock. I reiterate our longstanding concern that the Conference has still failed to agree on a substantive program of work. Re-establishment of subsidiary bodies would allow to continue focused and structured discussions in 2019 to advance the work of the Conference.

Mr President,

It is our collective duty to avoid the erosion of the rules based international order and to preserve and strengthen the existing agreements.

Let me start with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, two landmark conventions negotiated in the Conference on Disarmament.

In recent years the Chemical Weapons Convention has been defied on a number of occasions. This type of behavior poses a serious threat to the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime that we have committed to protect and strengthen. No one and nowhere should ever be exposed to such horrendous attacks and threats. Hence, it is our duty and responsibility to uphold the longstanding international norm against the use of chemical weapons.

Latvia has also placed high hopes in strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention regime. We should do everything in our power to prevent the threat of biological weapons becoming our reality. Hence, we deeply regret that the 2016 Review Conference fell short of expectations. The agreement on substantive activities reached in the 2017 Meeting of States Parties which was followed by expert work in 2018, gives some hope that we will succeed in the implementation of this important instrument. Nevertheless, we remain preoccupied by the dire financial situation of the Convention that puts the Secretariat and its work under considerable strain. Measures adopted at the 2018 meeting are steps in the right direction, but they will not remedy the chronic failure of some member states to honor their financial obligations under the Convention. I urge all States parties to fulfil their financial obligations under the BWC and the CCW on time and in full.

Mr President,

We are pleased to see the Non-Proliferation Treaty at the core of our security and stability. Latvia strongly believes that 50 years of the Treaty have extensively contributed to our arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. The Treaty with its three pillars remains the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts and a key element in reinforcing international peace and stability. Hence, as the NPT Review Conference is approaching, it is our responsibility to uphold and preserve the NPT, to promote its universalization and strengthen its implementation. Lack of the long-awaited

breakthrough in the Conference on Disarmament is creating parallel processes in other formats that risk undermining the Treaty.

We strongly believe that the right way forward lies in a progressive approach to nuclear disarmament. Any nuclear disarmament efforts must consider the wider security context and strategic stability. In this regard, the relevance of the “building blocks” set out in the NPT Action Plan 2010 have not lost their relevance. We should hold on to comprehensive, balanced and full implementation of the Plan.

Along with multilateral initiatives on disarmament, the role of the P5 process looms particularly large. We welcome nuclear weapons states` commitment to enhance coordination and dialogue under the Process. At the present security environment, interaction among P5 states has a major impact on international security and stability. We welcome P5`s commitment to the NPT in all its aspects, including support for the International Atomic Energy Agency`s safeguards system that was reiterated in P5 Conference last month in Beijing, China.

Moreover, we support further work on nuclear disarmament verification in the UN Group of Government Experts and in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. We also have high hopes for the dialogue about disarmament policy on the margins of the Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament initiative which was announced in October 2018.

Mr President,

Latvia supports sustainable and effective international arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation. We note the important role the INF Treaty has played in strengthening the Euro-Atlantic security for the past three decades. It was possible because of constructive dialogue between the parties and full compliance with their Treaty obligations. However, arms control can be effective only if all the parties abide by its rules. Russia`s INF violations have eroded the effectiveness of the Treaty. Now we need open, frank and constructive discussions to reestablish the trust required for effective multilateral negotiations in order to prevent a vacuum in the multilateral arms control architecture.

Mr President,

Last but not least, Latvia welcomes the global effort to mainstream the gender perspective in disarmament. Full and equal participation of women and men in all decision-making activities and levels is important for the credibility of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts in the long-term. As a national contribution to this objective, Latvia proposed addressing gender and gender based violence as the priority theme of its presidency in the 5th Conference of the States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty. It is based on three pillars: gender balance in representation, gendered impact of armed violence and conflict, and how best to bring aspects of gender based violence in the risk assessment on arms transfers. Our aim is to reach consensus at the CSP on the practical measures that States could take in order to mitigate the negative effects of gender-based violence.

To conclude, since 2004, Latvia is one of 27 States, which, through their endeavor to join up have continuously lent credibility to the Conference as the main international body for negotiations on disarmament. Therefore Latvia believes that it is important to continue consultations on expanding the membership of the Conference.

Thank you.