



Statement by

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at

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Thematic debate on nuclear weapons

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to align Ireland with the statements on behalf of the European Union and of the New Agenda Coalition, and with that by New Zealand concerning the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. To these I would add the following comments in a national capacity.

Since the last General Assembly meeting, I believe there has been a new sense of focus, priority and purpose in our collective discussion on nuclear weapons. For decades, this discussion had regrettably blurred somewhat our shared vision of a world completely free of nuclear weapons and of all other weapons of mass destruction.

It is our view that we have allowed ourselves to become sidetracked by the suggestion that, before we can begin to contemplate a world without nuclear weapons, we must first achieve "the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons." This is despite the fact that we have no clear shared understanding of what these conditions might be, nor of how and when they might be put in place. While recognising and commending efforts thus far to reduce nuclear arsenals, we recall the collective decision by many, more than forty years ago, to forego nuclear weapons entirely.

We undermine our message about the need to eliminate nuclear weapons now with discussions about "no first strike" policies, "minimum" deterrents and "credible" deterrents. Is deterrence not simply another way of describing the outdated and invalid notion of "mutually assured destruction"? Using the threat of mutual destruction to achieve peaceful co-existence between nations turns logic on its head. Ireland has never accepted the validity of any doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Nor can we understand how such a doctrine, asserted by some, could sit alongside the objective of a world free of nuclear weapons, aspired to by all.

We have failed to balance the NPT's irreducible requirement that we prevent the spread of these inhumane weapons against the Treaty's equally irreducible imperative that we eliminate the same weapons completely from existing arsenals. The logic of the NPT is absolute and requires consistency and balance across each of its pillars if it is to achieve its purpose.

We have rightly condemned the provocative and dangerous decision of the DPRK to persist in its weapons programme and conduct a further nuclear test explosion, which has in fact isolated the DPRK further and threatened stability on the entire Korean Peninsula with potentially wider repercussions. Yet, the DPRK's use of language on nuclear deterrence has a depressingly familiar ring to it. It is nuclear weapon state language reflected back at the nuclear weapon states. Ireland again asserts that nuclear deterrence has no place in any blueprint for national or international security. We call again on the DPRK to return to full compliance with its NPT, IAEA and UN Security Council obligations.

We have demanded of Iran assurances about the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. We welcome recent indications of possible progress in this respect. It is for Iran to resolve concerns about its nuclear programme. If any state comes to the NPT asserting its rights under the Treaty, then, as with all states, it must also recognise its obligations.

Ireland supports the tireless efforts of Ambassador Laajava of Finland to convene a conference on establishing a Middle East Zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. We call on all parties to participate.

We have, all of us, correctly expressed our complete revulsion at the recent use of another class of WMD, chemical weapons, in Syria this year. But we have not adequately reconciled this very clear international message about chemical weapons with a less than clear message about nuclear weapons. They are both weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons differ from chemical weapons only in that they are more indiscriminate and more devastating.

Mr. Chairman,

The renewed focus and purpose in the discussion on nuclear disarmament owes much to the re-emergence of the humanitarian consequences narrative. This offers us a means by which we can step beyond the constraints of traditional Treaty discussions to return to first principles and examine, first and foremost, the devastating consequences for men, women and children which would flow from any nuclear weapons detonation.

These consequences have been clearly established by the ICRC as unmanageable on any terms. The ICRC can speak with professional authority on this subject and we should listen

to them. In 1945, ICRC delegates witnessed the scenes at Hiroshima and Nagasaki first hand. Their reports convey clearly the sense of sheer helplessness which confronted those attempting to respond to the unfolding humanitarian disaster. As the distinguished representative of Japan underscored yesterday, this must never be repeated.

The very useful discussion last March in Oslo showed how governments and international organisations would be absolutely overwhelmed by the recurrence of a detonation involving modern weapons. We thank Norway for hosting that meeting and Mexico for offering to host a follow-on meeting next February.

The imperative of a world without nuclear weapons precisely because of the appalling consequences of using any of them is written into the DNA of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is why we oppose any attempts to acquire or proliferate these weapons. It is why we insist on the elimination of an existing global arsenal which today stands at more than 17,000 nuclear weapons. It is why we demand of any state asserting its right to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy that it must demonstrate the exclusively peaceful nature of its programme through complete cooperation with the IAEA safeguards system. In short, it is why we have a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Later in this meeting, New Zealand will deliver a statement on the humanitarian consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation. Its core message is practical, not political or legal, in content. This vital debate cannot be dismissed as a distraction from the work of negotiating the elimination of nuclear weapons: on the contrary, it must count among the foremost precepts that inform and guide the disarmament process. We encourage all members of this Assembly to support the New Zealand statement and to associate themselves by name with it. It does no more than assert a simple truth. This is that any nuclear weapons detonation – by accident, miscalculation or design – would be utterly devastating for human life. The inescapable conclusion is that such a detonation must never, under any circumstances, be allowed to happen.

Mr. Chairman,

Last November, the 67th UN General Assembly expressed very clearly its dissatisfaction with the lack of progress to date and established two new initiatives to facilitate discussions

on nuclear disarmament: a Group of Governmental Experts to examine possible aspects of a Fissile Material Treaty, and an Open Ended Working Group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. The Assembly also decided to convene the first ever High Level Meeting on nuclear disarmament, which took place last month. These were clear signals from the Assembly that time cannot stand still on nuclear disarmament. The initiatives were entirely consistent with the Action Plan agreed by consensus at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, Action 1 of which obliges states to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the NPT and with (quote): "the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons." The NPT is an enabling instrument, not one which seeks to inhibit initiatives aimed at promoting the Treaty's own fundamental object and purpose.

At the OEWG on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations this year, the New Agenda Coalition set aside matters of process and decided to elaborate, consistent with Article VI of the NPT, a series of essential elements without which any future instrument aimed at achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons could not fulfil its objective. These are: (1) the complete elimination of all existing nuclear weapons coupled with (2) a series of prohibitions against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, the possession, stockpiling, development or transfer of nuclear weapons, the production of or use of already existing fissile material for weapons purposes, and the testing of nuclear weapons.

Ultimately, the NAC is concerned with progress on nuclear disarmament, not process, and these elements offer a basis for achieving progress. Any instrument or set of instruments which might elaborate them further will be entirely consistent with the NPT because Article VI of the Treaty requires the pursuit of (quote) "effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control." It could not be clearer.

What we do or don't do in disarmament fora has a very real impact on people's lives. We all know what is asked of us. We will be judged accordingly.

Thank you.