



Statement by

H.E. Mr. David Donoghue

Permanent Representative

at the

UNGA 68 First Committee General Debate

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Mr. Chairman,

May I congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the First Committee and assure you of my delegation's full support throughout this session.

Ireland would like to associate itself with the statement delivered by the European Union, and with that of Egypt on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition.

I would like to add the following remarks in a national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

The recent use of chemical weapons in Syria offers us a stark and horrific reminder of why the international community has a duty to work pro-actively to eliminate weapons of mass destruction in all their forms and from all military arsenals.

The Chemical Weapons Convention stands as a successful Treaty instrument by any standards. It enjoys near universal adherence and, only fifteen short years since it entered into force, it has almost reached its goal of eliminating an entire weapons category from global arsenals. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is already contemplating its role in a chemical weapons free world.

And yet, the appalling scenes which emerged from Syria in August demonstrate clearly that there can be no room for complacency with regard to chemical weapons. Television images of the immediate humanitarian consequences of their use on innocent civilians in Damascus, including children, stand as testimony to this fact. The international community has rightly conveyed its sense of complete revulsion at these events, and its abhorrence of any use of chemical weapons under any circumstances. For the vast majority of UN member states, the days of these weapons as weapons of war are over. They must never be allowed to re-enter military arsenals, and we must therefore continue to press ahead in our efforts to achieve universal adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention and full implementation of its provisions.

Mr Chairman,

Ireland believes that, as with chemical weapons, the days of nuclear weapons are also over. And yet, forty three years on from the entry into force of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the global nuclear arsenal stands in excess of 17,000 weapons as the international community remains mired in discussions about the conditions which must prevail before these weapons can be consigned to history along with the other weapons of mass destruction which humanity has already prohibited. This is no longer sustainable and no longer acceptable.

One of the most important outcomes which flowed from the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference was the re-emergence of the “humanitarian consequences” narrative on nuclear weapons. It has offered a means of stepping beyond the constraints of traditional Treaty discussions to return to first principles and examine, first and foremost, the practical consequences for mankind of any nuclear weapons detonation. These consequences can be described as calamitous for men, women and children who are caught up in a nuclear explosion and have been clearly established by the ICRC as unmanageable and beyond the control of individual administrations and agencies. The extent to which Governments would be overwhelmed in such a situation was made clear by the very useful discussion last March in Oslo regarding the humanitarian impact of a nuclear weapons detonation. We are grateful to the Government of Norway for hosting that meeting and to the Government of Mexico for agreeing to host a follow-on meeting next February.

Meanwhile, a statement acknowledging the catastrophic consequences which would flow from any nuclear weapons detonation offers us both a basis for reframing our debate about nuclear weapons and an impetus for achieving progress. This vital debate cannot be dismissed as a distraction from the work of negotiating the elimination of nuclear weapons: on the contrary, it must be among the foremost precepts that inform and guide that process. For far too long, we have allowed process to trump progress in nuclear disarmament negotiations. Now we must put the emphasis instead on making progress.

Last November, the 67th UN General Assembly expressed very clearly its dissatisfaction with the lack of progress on disarmament. By overwhelming majority votes, it established two new initiatives to facilitate new 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 General Assembly that in the view of the overwhelming majority of countries time cannot stand still on nuclear disarmament.

There is, in particular, a growing impatience that the Conference on Disarmament, which was designed to be the world's multilateral disarmament negotiating body, has been unable to perform its role for over fifteen years, despite the many pressing arms control challenges facing us today.

We have seen the effective role which the General Assembly can play, for example with respect to the Arms Trade Treaty.

A comprehensive and robust Arms Trade Treaty has long been a major foreign policy priority for Ireland. Its adoption is a significant achievement and its effective implementation would be a triumph for the international community. It demonstrates the vital contribution which the United Nations can make towards international peace and security.

However, we must not now lose momentum. We must concentrate our efforts on encouraging States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty at the earliest opportunity so that it can enter into force and begin saving lives. Nationally, we are working swiftly towards ratification in the coming months.

For too long, the unregulated trade in arms has exacted a heavy toll on lives, crippled economies, and deflected precious resources away from sustainable development; the ATT has the potential to make a real and lasting difference.

Mr. Chairman,

In the past year, we have seen deeply worrying reports of the use of anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions and incendiary weapons against civilian targets. Indeed, recent images of the aftermath of what appears to be the use of fuel air explosives on a school in Syria are deeply shocking.

We must never forget, Mr. Chairman, that what we do or don't do in this room and in all disarmament fora has a very real impact on people across the world. Ireland remains deeply committed to achieving disarmament not just as a political goal, but as a humanitarian one.