

Opening Remarks

by
Angela Kane
High Representative
United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs



First Session of the Preparatory Committee
for the 2015 NPT Review Conference
Vienna, Austria
30 April 2012

I am grateful for this honour to address this opening meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference. I wish at the outset to congratulate Ambassador Peter Wolcott of Australia as he assumes his duties as Chair of this session of the Preparatory Committee. Along with my staff in the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, I look forward to assisting the Chair and all delegations throughout the review process.

This is my first opportunity to address an NPT gathering as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and it is gratifying to do so following the successful outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, which included agreement on a 64-point Action Plan.

Also adopted was a mandate to convene a conference this year on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. I very much look forward to the report to the Preparatory Committee by the Conference Facilitator, Mr. Jaakko Laajava, on his consultations concerning that event.

As I look back on these accomplishments, I recall the statement made by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon upon the opening of the third session of the Preparatory Committee to the 2010 Review Conference. His advice then remains valid today as the Preparatory Committee commences a new session—and I quote:

I urge you to work in a spirit of compromise and flexibility. I hope you will avoid taking absolute positions that have no chance of generating consensus. Instead, build bridges, and be part of a new multilateralism. [unquote]

It was the willingness of the States parties to work in this spirit that led to the consensus in 2010. I hope that this will serve as an inspiration for efforts to maintain this momentum throughout the review process to come, while recognizing that it is clearly not the purpose of this session of the Preparatory Committee to resolve all questions that will be addressed later in the review process.

Efforts today are already well underway both inside and outside the review process to advance the three primary goals of the NPT relating to nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Following their earlier meeting in London in September 2009, nuclear-weapon States met in Paris in late June 2011 and again in London earlier this month to address issues relating to the implementation of their NPT Article VI commitments. These discussions are welcome and have served to heighten international expectations for concrete progress in such fields as enhancing transparency and developing nuclear disarmament verification measures.

The Secretary-General has done all he can—again in his words—“to bring the rule of law to disarmament”. This is apparent in his many statements on this issue, most notably his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal of 24 October 2008. It was also reflected in his initiative to convene a High Level Meeting in September 2010 on Revitalizing the Work of the Conference on Disarmament and Taking Forward Multilateral Disarmament Negotiations.

Complementing these developments have been other initiatives outside the scope of the Treaty that can contribute to progress in both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

The recent Seoul Nuclear Security Summit is a case in point, as it reaffirmed the goals shared by the participants in nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy—the three pillars of the NPT. The Summit also advanced its primary purpose of strengthening commitments to enhance security over nuclear materials to prevent nuclear terrorism. Such commitments built upon many themes from the High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security, convened by the Secretary-General in September last year.

I believe that what we are witnessing in these developments are not isolated events, but inter-related phases of an unfolding process. This is a process seeking to produce concrete progress in fulfilling solemn commitments made pursuant to the Treaty and its review process. While the road ahead will not be easy, adding to this momentum would certainly be a legitimate goal of this first session of the Preparatory Committee.

The NPT without a review process would be but an empty shell, without any effective means of maintaining genuine accountability for the fulfilment of commitments and legal obligations under the Treaty. It is the review process that enables States Parties collectively to take stock of progress made, and to identify new achievements that are needed. It is the review process that helps to sustain the NPT as a “living” Treaty that is periodically assessed in light of the ever-evolving political and strategic circumstances of our times.

One recent innovation in this process is especially noteworthy—namely, the consensus language at the last Review Conference recognizing the catastrophic consequences from the use of any nuclear weapon and affirming the “the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law.” While there is still a way to go in achieving a nuclear weapon convention, there are many ways to bring the rule of law to disarmament. It is now beyond question that international humanitarian law has already arrived here in the NPT review process—and it is here to stay.

Yet the Treaty continues to face several serious challenges, ranging from the continued manufacture and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons, to concerns over possible nuclear weapons aspirations by additional States. Such concerns jeopardize both non-proliferation and disarmament goals and therefore merit close attention in this Treaty review process.

While its outcome is difficult to predict, prospects for this review process will be brightest if the States Parties can deepen their solidarity on the Treaty’s fundamental purposes, while demonstrating flexibility and compromise on the means to achieve their agreed ends, as the Secretary-General has suggested. This approach worked well in 2010 and it offers a sensible path to success in 2015.

Despite the work that remains ahead, the NPT remains the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. It is the only treaty that obligates all recognized nuclear-weapon States—and all other States Parties—to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament. It has expanded to just short of full universal membership. And it offers a common agreed framework for pursuing both disarmament and non-proliferation goals. For these reasons, I wish to extend to all delegations my best wishes for a successful session.