

Interventions: Statements of the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations

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NPT PrepCom**

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Mr. Chairman,

My delegation congratulates you on your election to chair this final preparatory meeting of the 2015 NPT Review Conference. I assure you of our full cooperation.

Each review cycle of the Non-Proliferation Treaty becomes increasingly important because the longer the delay in fulfilling the treaty's aims, the greater the risk that the fragile state of international security will be breached by a cataclysmic tragedy involving the use of nuclear weapons.

It is now 44 years since the NPT entered into force and a quarter of a century since the end of the Cold War. The continued existence of some 17,000 nuclear weapons, along with modernization programs that appear to assume that nuclear weapons will continue to be part of military arsenals well into the second half of the 21st century, undermine the NPT. Without robust progress toward the elimination of nuclear weapons, the day may not be far off when the treaty is regarded as a relic of an earlier age.

A vibrant NPT is essential to attaining the goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world. If one of the treaty's central obligations – negotiations toward the elimination of nuclear weapons – continues to be implemented so timidly and at such an unacceptably slow pace, confidence in the viability of the non-proliferation regime could gradually weaken and the risk of further proliferation would increase.

The principal nuclear-weapon states take what would seem to be an unbalanced approach to the treaty: while demonstrating a strong interest in curtailing proliferation, their commitment to divesting themselves of these instruments of hegemonic power lacks the same urgency. The nuclear-weapons states argue that they need those weapons for their security, while giving short shrift to the views of experts in diverse fields of human activity, such as science, the military, law, and morality, that nuclear weapons are the epitome of insecurity.

Mr. Chairman,

The military doctrine of nuclear deterrence is regarded by a great number of countries as a prime obstacle to meaningful progress on nuclear disarmament. It exists as an elemental part of security force structures that hinder the development of our globalized and interdependent world. Moreover, it is used to justify the modernization of existing stockpiles of nuclear weapons, thus obstructing genuine nuclear disarmament.

The many states now engaged in a series of diplomatic meetings to discuss the “catastrophic humanitarian consequences” of the use of nuclear weapons recognize the danger of the frustratingly slow progress toward a nuclear-weapons-free world. These meetings, begun in Oslo last year, and continued this year in Nayrit, with a third meeting planned for Vienna, are spelling out in excruciating detail the horrors that would befall humanity in the event of the accidental or deliberate use of nuclear weapons. The logical course of action is clear: urgent and expedited progress leading to a global legal ban on nuclear weapons to accompany the current global bans on other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons.

However, diplomatic meetings by themselves cannot start a process to produce a ban. We need a genuine political process that can help achieve this end. The unprecedented High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, convened at the UN in September 2013, attempted to generate that political momentum. Accordingly, my Delegation hopes that the major states will take more substantial and resolute action to eliminate the scourge of these morally unacceptable nuclear weapons that could indiscriminately annihilate non-combatants and combatants alike in times of war as well as in times of peace.

In light of the above, clearly it would be better to have the nuclear-weapon states working with the non-nuclear states to prepare a common path to develop a legally binding instrument banning the possession of nuclear weapons. The Oslo-Nayrit-Vienna process demonstrates that pressure is mounting to undertake the preparatory work for a ban. Governments that recognize the urgency for such action may be tempted to try to achieve it without the participation of the major nuclear states, and outside of the framework of existing mechanisms and institutions such as bilateral strategic weapons negotiations and the Conference on Disarmament, where the efforts of the nuclear weapon states to date have been so modest.

In my Delegation’s view, Governments should not have to make such a choice. A good faith commitment to the NPT should assure and even enhance the cooperation of all its parties, thereby moving the world closer to the elimination of nuclear weapons in a unified manner. The major states that truly value the NPT should ensure that the negotiating process actually produces comprehensive nuclear disarmament at a greatly accelerated pace.

For many years, the Holy See has called for the abolition of nuclear weapons in order that the world may be freed from the potential specter of mass destruction. Today, we renew that moral call to inspire and animate constructive work to preserve our planet and all of humanity. It should not be the case that the nuclear-weapons states continue to spend more than \$100 billion per year to maintain their nuclear weapons, while this precious financial resource is so desperately needed for economic and social development, including the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, to meet the needs of the world’s poorest. Indeed, the question of peace and security as a prerequisite for sustainable development becomes moot in the face of the threats posed to humankind by existing nuclear arsenal.

At the 2010 Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, my

Delegation stated that the world has arrived at an opportune moment to begin addressing in a systematic way the legal, political and technical requisites for a nuclear-weapons-free world. It is therefore our hope that preparatory work will begin as soon as possible on a comprehensive agreement leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons. This effort need in no way obstruct the steps and building blocks presently envisioned to support the objective of a nuclear-weapons-free world, steps such as further reductions in arsenals of weapons, entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

In this regard, it is vital that the conference on the establishment of a zone in the Middle East free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction, which all parties at the 2010 Review Conference agreed to hold, finally be convened. Here, not only is the credibility of the NPT at risk, but the peace process and the security of the region do require the assurance of all parties that the Middle East will *not* become the site of a nuclear arms race.

Despite setbacks, nuclear disarmament is by no means a lost cause. There is a gradual awakening of conscience taking place in the world, as the Oslo-Nayrit-Vienna process illustrates. Driven forward by science, technology, communications, transport and industry, and a new awareness of the unity and interdependence of the human family, the pace of humanity's global integration is gathering speed. Nuclear weapons -- the antithesis of humankind's yearning for peace -- should have no place in a world community determined to achieve mutual security on a global scale.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.