Opening Remarks

By

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“Roads to Nuclear Disarmament: a Case of Convergence in Diversity”

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I wish at the outset to thank Vice Minister Edgardo Riveros for hosting this seminar and Ambassador Alfredo Labbé for inviting me to participate. The timing for this meeting could not be more ideal. One month ago today, representatives from 158 States – and indeed many of us in this room – attended the third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, hosted by Austria. As we start the New Year, States parties to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) are now beginning to prepare for the 2015 Review Conference in earnest.

The theme of this seminar – convergence in diversity – neatly captures in one elegant phrase one of the major trends that has emerged from this NPT review cycle. The outcome of the 2010 NPT Review Conference reflected a rare moment of unity on nuclear disarmament. Yet, in the years since that consensus we have seen remarkable new efforts, new initiatives and new narratives. In multilateral settings, we typically recognize diverse views as actually signifying the presence of divergent views – or the lack of consensus as we might diplomatically refer to it. But in the case of established and emerging approaches to disarmament, they are aimed at the single goal of achieving and maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons.

The history of global nuclear disarmament and arms control efforts is a case study of convergence in diversity. The starting point for this diversity is represented by the NPT itself, which established a balance of mutual and reciprocal obligations between its two classes of States. As stated in the preamble of the Treaty, these divergent commitments aimed at a single purpose: “to further the easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between States in order to facilitate the cessation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, the liquidation of all their existing stockpiles, and the elimination from national arsenals of nuclear weapons.”

A second critical point of convergence in diversity is also found in the NPT. Its Article VII stipulates that nothing in the Treaty “affects the right of any group of States to conclude regional treaties in order to assure the total absence of nuclear weapons in their respective territories.”

Following from this, each of the five existing nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties is above all an arrangement to promote security and trust within a region and to obtain assurances against any nuclear attack. But they also converge on the single objective of contributing to general and complete disarmament and, more specifically, to the global elimination of nuclear weapons.

Thus, in these various treaties, the parties express their desire “to contribute, so far as lies in their power, towards ending the arms race, especially in the field of nuclear weapons.” They recall that nuclear-weapon-free zones are not ends in themselves but rather a means for achieving global disarmament. And they affirm that regional arms control measures can contribute to these goals and promote common security.

The disarmament objective in these treaties is based on the conviction that all States are obliged to contribute to systematic efforts to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons globally. This is no surprise, as the disarmament obligations in Article VI of the NPT apply to each of the Parties.
This leads me to a final point of convergence in diversity. As we look forward to the 2015 NPT Review Conference, it is evident that there are several distinct visions of what the future of nuclear disarmament should look like.

According to the traditional approach, disarmament can come only through a set of progressive, legally-binding steps. These include familiar and long-sought objectives like the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and a treaty ending the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons. Another approach – one supported by a majority of Member States – calls for negotiation of a nuclear weapon convention which should provide for the total elimination of nuclear weapons according to specified timelines.

This new approach is driven by the deep concern and growing understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons. This concern inspired the General Assembly in 2012 to establish an open-ended working group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral disarmament negotiations. Of course, it has also led to the three international conferences, which have brought humanitarian considerations to the forefront of nuclear disarmament.

None of the various approaches I have described are inherently incompatible with each other or are mutually exclusive. They can be pursued sequentially or in parallel. In the end, it’s not important which road to disarmament we choose. What’s important is that these various paths converge on the same point: the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

I very much hope that our discussions over the next two days make a positive contribution to the NPT Review Conference.