“Promoting a Successful Outcome of the 2015 NPT Review Conference”

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to extend my appreciation to the Government of Sweden for the invitation to join Foreign Minister Wallström at this event.

I also wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassador Taous Feroukhi on her appointment as President of the Review Conference. Guiding this Conference towards success is no easy task, but I have confidence that you have the skills to do so.

No one needs to be reminded that the stakes at this Conference are high. After all, when it comes to nuclear weapons, the stakes are always high.

Yet it is worth mentioning that at the 2010 Review Conference – a real moment of unanimity amongst States parties – we benefited from a favourable political climate that provided us with a sound foundation for a successful outcome.

At this moment, conversely, we are presented with a challenging international security environment. East-West relations are strained, there have been accusations of non-compliance with international agreements and international law, and the Middle East is in continuous turmoil. The rise of powerful non-state actors, as well emerging threats such as cyber warfare have only added to this complexity.

This renewed tension has coincided with allegations of non-compliance with arms control agreements, deepening levels of support for security doctrines based on nuclear deterrence, the ongoing or planned modernization of nuclear arsenals and delivery systems, and a lack of common vision or interest in working toward nuclear zero.

For nearly three decades following the end of the Cold War, tremendous strides were taken in reducing nuclear arsenals. Disappointingly, this process appears to have stalled.

Amidst these challenges, it is therefore, important to remember why we are here today, what the NPT has achieved and what it represents.

For over four decades this Treaty has provided its States parties with real, tangible security benefits. It has provided a near universal and verifiable commitment by States to eschew nuclear weapons by nearly all UN member States and established the only active multilateral mechanism to pursue their elimination.

As members of the international community, we are all invested in ensuring that it remains one of the lode-bearing pillars of our common security and, therefore, in safeguarding a successful outcome from this Review Conference.

This, of course, begs the question – given the challenging circumstances, what would constitute a successful outcome from this conference?

In my opinion, the following should be the baseline for a successful outcome:

First, the Review Conference should establish a common expectation for what the regime will look like in 2020—its fiftieth anniversary.
Second, all States parties should recognise that their national interests are best served by faithfully implementing, and remaining in strict compliance with, all of the Treaty’s goals and obligations.

Third the Conference must able to forge consensus on a clear path to implement the 64-point Action Plan agreed in 2010.

Finally, the Conference needs to reverse recent trends and re-affirm that the only way to remove the existential danger nuclear weapons pose to humanity is to eliminate them.

Of course, it is one thing to outline what a successful Conference should look like, it is quite another to achieve it.

Here I think it is important for States parties to remember that the NPT is built on a bargain.

It is a bargain under which non-nuclear weapon states forgo nuclear weapons, nuclear weapon States commit to negotiations on disarmament, and all states have the right to benefit from peaceful nuclear energy.

Many non-nuclear-weapon States are rightfully concerned that recent actions by nuclear weapon States are at odds with this bargain.

They see the absence of concrete progress by the nuclear-weapon States to implement the commitments made in 2010 as unfairly skewing the onus of compliance.

Because the clear majority of non-nuclear weapon States do not view the Action Plan as open-ended or to be fulfilled at a time when international conditions are favorable. Rather, they want to see it implemented with a sense of urgency that matches the very real threat that nuclear weapons pose to us all.

If we have to wait till the conditions are “ripe” for nuclear disarmament, I am afraid we are not going to see any progress soon. Moreover, this imposed conditionality ignores the contribution nuclear disarmament could make to a more stable international climate by, inter alia, reducing the risk of unchecked escalation and nuclear blackmail.

All States parties welcomed the recommitment in February by the nuclear weapon States to a world free of nuclear weapons. Their efforts to remove the opacity surrounding weapons stockpiles and doctrine should also be applauded.

However, transparency and confidence-building measures cannot substitute for further arsenal reductions or a Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty in force, or the reduced role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines.

Nuclear-weapon States need to acknowledge how frustrated many non-nuclear weapon States have become with a step-by-step approach to disarmament. These States are actively seeking more immediate avenues to a world free of nuclear weapons.

One of these avenues is the humanitarian discourse.
This approach has produced a growing understanding of the catastrophic human consequences of nuclear weapons and seeks to ground that understanding in international law. Around 80 percent of the NPT’s membership has articulated their support for this approach. They will not be ignored.

The Review Conference will also need to discuss how to make progress on the long-awaited Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

It is not clear how the Review Conference can best accelerate this process; suffice to say that it should facilitate a mechanism that will allow states of the region to move forward on the issue with a shared vision and purpose.

A Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction can provide regional security benefits, in addition to the disarmament and non-proliferation gains that would flow from such an agreement.

The fissures between NPT States parties can seem insurmountable, yet I remain optimistic that with the necessary diplomatic skills and political flexibility a compromise can be found.

It must a compromise that recognizes the relationship between disarmament and non-proliferation – that one cannot be advanced without the other. Above all, it must reaffirm that the elimination of nuclear weapons benefits all humanity and to find an expeditious route to achieve this goal.

The world is looking to the parties to the NPT to exercise sound judgment and act for the benefit of all humanity. I have confidence that States parties will do so.