Disarmament and Non-proliferation Education
Case Studies and Best Practices for the Future

Statement by

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Colleagues and Friends,

It is an honour to be here with you today alongside such distinguished panellists. At the outset, I want to thank the Governments of Japan and Mexico for hosting their event and for their unwavering efforts aimed at highlighting the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation education.

Five years ago, the 2010 NPT Review Conference agreed on 64 recommendations for follow-on action. Action 22 encouraged all States to “implement the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/124) regarding the United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education, in order to advance the goals of the Treaty in support of achieving a world without nuclear weapons”. This is a clear acknowledgment by the States Parties to the NPT that disarmament and non-proliferation education is an essential element in achieving the treaty’s objectives. Therefore, today’s event is very opportune.

Unfortunately, education has often been an overlooked component of the global disarmament efforts. However, its importance cannot be underestimated and I am pleased to note that it is gaining momentum.

As apathy and ignorance replace the fear and outrage that once surrounded the topic of nuclear weapons, it is becoming ever more necessary to educate the younger generations about the devastating and catastrophic impact such weapons have had and can again have on humanity. So, in attempting to engage young people, disarmament educators must defy a climate of apathy without inducing fear.

Younger generations are not plagued by the threat of imminent annihilation by weapons of mass destruction. Nor do we want them to be. And yet, the threat of nuclear weapons does still exist. Indeed, as nuclear technology advances, their destructive capacity increases dramatically with dire consequences for the entire planet. This is an inescapable reality.

I have had the pleasure of meeting several groups of young students from different regions of the world who are interested in learning more about nuclear weapons and through this learning have become ardent advocates of efforts aiming at their elimination. So it evident that education is key to changing minds, policies and positions.

At a recent interaction with a youth delegation from Global Zero and high school students from Hiroshima and Okinawa, I was impressed by their knowledge and understanding of the history, politics and science of nuclear weapons. More importantly, I was inspired by their unwavering commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament. These young people prove that through education, we can strip nuclear weapons of its myth as a weapon of prestige and power.

But other encounters with young people have demonstrated that the value of disarmament and non-proliferation education extends well beyond nuclear weapons.
Combatting arms smuggling is no less complicated than nuclear disarmament. And, as we have seen in our work with young people, education can have a tangible and powerful impact on individual lives. Instilling in young people the importance of effective communication and impressing upon them respect for diversity and tolerance may be all it takes to prevent the outbreak of armed violence. And this is why – despite its challenges – we are so committed to promoting disarmament and non-proliferation education.

So how can we galvanise young people to take action against nuclear weapons without overwhelming them?

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) promotes disarmament and non-proliferation education activities with Member States, non-governmental organizations and the general public through the internet, print publications, conferences and workshops, media events and public speaking engagements.

At any of the locations where the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) has offices, New York, Geneva, Vienna, Lomé, Lima or Kathmandu, UNODA staff regularly brief groups of students on disarmament matters. Briefings are usually to college or graduate school students, but also include presentations to younger grades.

My colleague, Mr. John Ennis, Chief of Information and Outreach, will elaborate more on the numerous education and outreach activities of the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Today we have an invaluable opportunity to share experiences and best practices. I am confident that today’s discussions will be thought-provoking and stimulating, given the blue-ribbon speakers and their broad and far-reaching experience.

I want to thank you for your ongoing commitment to this important pursuit.