Brainstorming Workshop:
Dialogue on Nuclear Disarmament

By

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Ladies and gentlemen, excellencies, distinguished participants and guests. I very much welcome this opportunity to address this timely workshop on nuclear disarmament. The non-nuclear-weapon States have a lot to contribute in advancing this issue and there remains considerable potential for future cross-regional approaches in moving this agenda forward. These are useful focal points for our discussions to come.

I wish to thank Ambassador Desra Percaya for hosting this event and Dr. William Potter for organizing it. It is a privilege for me to work with both of these dedicated champions of nuclear disarmament. In many ways, it is the existence of people of this calibre who give me hope for progress in this very challenging field.

Needless to say, the timing of this workshop could not be better. It is taking place against a background of many broader efforts of the international community to advance multilateral nuclear disarmament, including the Secretary-General’s own important speech on nuclear disarmament at the Monterey Institute of International Studies last week. This is certainly an excellent time to be thinking and discussing priorities for collective action to advance the nuclear disarmament agenda.

Let me now turn to the theme of this workshop.

Discussions about disarmament often focus exclusively on actions required by the nuclear-armed States alone. Yet non-nuclear-weapon States also have both an important role and a shared responsibility.

As parties to the NPT, they have a legal obligation under Article VI of that Treaty to undertake “to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament”, as well as on a treaty on general and complete disarmament. This responsibility also applies to a number of non-nuclear-weapon States that continue to rely on nuclear deterrence in their own collective security doctrines.

The engagement of non-nuclear-weapon States is important for another reason. Without their efforts, it is not possible to sustain political pressure for nuclear disarmament. Now I am sure everyone in this room today has heard it said many times before that what is holding back nuclear disarmament is “lack of political will”. Well, I would argue that it is precisely this political pressure from the international diplomatic community—reinforced by persistent efforts by civil society—that together forms the very backbone of political will.

And when this diplomatic and popular advocacy is combined with enlightened leadership by nuclear-weapon States—as was demonstrated in President Obama’s famous speech in Prague in April 2009—these conditions can produce a “perfect storm” to advance disarmament goals. At that very moment, political will has reached its highest potential to effect positive change.
There are many opportunities for coalitions of non-nuclear-weapon States in this field, especially those with diverse memberships from above and below the Equator. This is what made the New Agenda Coalition an irresistible force at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. This is also why the ministerial meetings of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative are so important. It is crucial for decision-makers in the nuclear-armed States to understand that non-nuclear-weapon States really do attach a high priority to progress in disarmament.

Even as this workshop gets underway, Governments, diplomats and civil society are thinking ahead to the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. That event is unique and significant in the review process, as it traditionally provides States parties with an occasion to exchange views on the implementation of the Treaty without the pressure of debating procedure or with adopting a consensus outcome.

The goal will not be merely to take stock of what has been accomplished, or perhaps more accurately, to complain about what has not been accomplished. Rather, it should allow delegations to register their expectations for future action. As specified in Action 5 of the 2010 final document, this includes consideration of the next steps for the full implementation of article VI. I would argue that now is the time to begin seriously developing and building support for these steps.

In this spirit, I would like to offer some priorities for 2013, and I am offering these not in any order of urgency since I view them all as important.

The first priority is ceasing modernization.

Nuclear weapon budgets should be placed at the centre of the discussion. As Governments grapple with the realities of fiscal austerity, economic arguments have become especially relevant. The continued development and qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons and their associated infrastructure not only weaken the disarmament “pillar” of the NPT, but also constitute a barrier to sustainable economic recovery. Simply put, nuclear weapon spending is an inefficient means of generating jobs and most nuclear weapon technologies have no direct spin-offs in the civilian economy.

Besides, even if such spending did produce some economic benefits, this hardly provides a justification for the failure to fulfil disarmament commitments. If we’re going to modernize anything, let’s modernize disarmament, not nuclear weapons. Fund it. Enact implementing legislation. Give it an infrastructure. Invest in enhanced verification measures. Educate the public. Train government officials. This is the modernization we need.

The second priority is sustaining non-proliferation.

Non-nuclear-weapon States have sometimes differed on how this can best be achieved. The debate often devolves into what should come first: disarmament or non-
proliferation? In reality, the consensus in the NPT has been that these twin objectives must be advanced together.

The future of disarmament and non-proliferation can follow many possible trajectories. Two of these are, of course, a nuclear weapons convention or a framework of mutually reinforcing agreements. The 2010 Review Conference recognized the Secretary-General’s consistent support for these objectives. The challenge for 2015 will be to carry forward these objectives. What we definitely do not need is an endless debate over preconditions that must first be met before disarmament is possible. Nor do we need a tit-for-tat approach of demanding preconditions before non-proliferation commitments are fulfilled. Nuclear disarmament will never be achieved through a process of mutual hostage taking.

The third priority is advancing the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament.

The development, production or use of nuclear weapons is increasingly being seen worldwide as incompatible with the requirements of international humanitarian law. At the 2012 session of the General Assembly First Committee 34 States endorsed a joint statement on the humanitarian dimensions of nuclear disarmament.

The high level of interest in the Oslo Conference to be convened in March underscores the potential saliency of humanitarian approaches. The humanitarian angle could be an important entry point for linking the pursuit of nuclear disarmament to other communities and constituencies. The entire global human rights community should support disarmament efforts, as should anyone who deeply cares about social and economic development. The more disarmament is connected with the interests and ideals of individual citizens, the stronger will be its political foundation for future progress.

The fourth priority is strengthening the overarching framework for pursuing global nuclear disarmament.

Prohibiting nuclear weapons is too often viewed as an end in itself, and too seldom is serious thought given to the challenge of maintaining international peace and security in a world without nuclear weapons—and also during the disarmament process. The time has come for countries to start exploring the cross-cutting relationships that exist between related subjects in this field.

It makes sense, for example, to think more about the relationship between nuclear disarmament and the elimination of other types of weapons of mass destruction, the reduction of global military spending, and the regulation of conventional armaments. How these pieces fit together will make the difference in determining whether we will be achieving a world with zero nuclear weapons—or just achieving zero results.
I believe that the fifth priority for the international community should be to revitalize the UN disarmament machinery.

This week, the Conference on Disarmament (CD) began its annual session. The Secretary-General again sent a strong message to the CD: We cannot afford to lose yet another year. No one doubts that the CD should remain the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament. Yet, it must live up to its role. If it cannot, the General Assembly and ultimately Member States have their own responsibilities for advancing disarmament negotiations in any way possible.

As we all know, in December 147 States voted in favour of the establishment of an open-ended working group in the General Assembly. This could be an important forum for the development of new thinking. After 15 years of deadlock, I hope that all Governments are prepared to approach this initiative with a constructive spirit. This working group should not shy away from taking a comprehensive look at the disarmament agenda.

In some respects, the core agenda of the CD still reflects priorities from the 1960s. At that time, the nuclear powers were still avidly conducting nuclear tests and expanding their inventories of fissile materials. In this context, the development of legally-binding partial measures to end these activities was made urgent by the Cold War hostilities and the prospects that other countries might become collateral causalities in a nuclear war.

Yet today, even without the force of binding international law, many of these activities have all but ceased—we have de facto global norms (though not yet universal) both against testing and the production of fissile materials for use in weapons. Even the most ardent supporters of these “partial measures” do not claim that these alone are sufficient to achieve disarmament—these measures are not ends in themselves but are necessary components of a larger strategy to achieve global nuclear disarmament. This makes it all the more important for the CD to start taking nuclear disarmament seriously as a subject for negotiations. Such negotiations are not premature. They are long overdue.

There is no question that global nuclear disarmament can only be achieved and sustained through a legally-binding, mutually-verifiable and irreversible treaty. Yet, credible arms reductions—whether agreed bilaterally or undertaken unilaterally—can also occur without cumbersome treaty negotiations, as demonstrated in the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991 which led to a substantial reduction of deployments in tactical nuclear weapons by the Russian Federation and the United States. History has shown that the process of negotiating partial measures can easily become stopping points rather than an expressway to disarmament.

The open-ended working group would miss an important opportunity if it failed to address these important questions.
Finally, in September the General Assembly will convene a High-level Meeting on nuclear disarmament. This one-day plenary could be used both to signal high level expectations for the future as well as to inject new political impetus to the process of nuclear disarmament.

If all other efforts fail to advance disarmament negotiations, next year the group of governmental experts on fissile materials is set to commence work. When the time comes, this could be another mechanism that could be used to gain leverage.

Before concluding, I must mention that this year will include its share of challenges as well. Principal among these is the need to convene as soon as possible the Conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. The importance of convening this Conference can scarcely be overstated, because of its pivotal role in launching a diplomatic process leading to the establishment of that zone. As the Secretary-General stated last week in Monterey, “we have missed a deadline. But we have not lost the opportunity to move this initiative forward.”

Continuing international concerns pertaining to other specific proliferation challenges should not detract from the need to advance disarmament. Rather, such concerns only underscore the need for strengthening the rule of law in this field. This has been a personal priority of the Secretary-General, which I am sure is shared by all of you here today.

Please accept my very best wishes as you dig deeper into these complex issues.