

[As prepared for delivery]
Remarks
by
H.E. Mr. Thani Thongphakdi
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand
Chair of the Open-ended Working Group
taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations
at the Side-event on
Multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament – ways forward
Tuesday 18 October 2016, 13.00 hrs
United Nations Headquarters, Room 7

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was an honour for me to chair the Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

As you know, the Working Group met in Geneva since the beginning of this year. The meetings were well attended by States as well as international organizations and civil society all of whom contributed immensely to discussions. The work of the OEWG was underpinned by deep concern over the threat to humanity posed by the existence of nuclear weapons and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any detonation. The risk of these catastrophic humanitarian consequences will remain as long as nuclear weapons exist. The increased awareness of and well-documented presentations on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons compel urgent and necessary action by all States leading to a world without nuclear weapons.

For many States, there was a need to shift from a focus on reducing the role of nuclear weapons to stigmatizing nuclear weapon, including by changing international and public attitudes regarding policies and practices that are premised on the acceptance of nuclear weapons. This shift would be consistent with the humanitarian pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons, in which subscribing States commit to stigmatise, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences, environmental impact and other associated risks.

In this regard, many approaches, many ways forward, were considered, including, inter alia, the pursuit of a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination; a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention, which would set out general obligations, prohibitions and practical arrangements for time-bound, irreversible and verifiable nuclear disarmament; a framework agreement, which would comprise either a set of mutually reinforcing instruments dealing progressively with various aspects of the nuclear disarmament process; a hybrid approach; and a “progressive approach”, focusing on the importance of the existing global regime, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and consisting of parallel and simultaneous effective legal and non-legal measures.

It was noted by some that the various approaches were partially overlapping, not necessarily mutually exclusive and could make different contributions to nuclear disarmament.

In the end, though, on 19 August 2016, the Working Group adopted a landmark report which recommended with widespread support for the General Assembly to convene a conference in 2017, open to all States, with the participation and contribution of international organizations and civil society, to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination.

It was also affirmed that the development of any effective legal measures for nuclear disarmament can only be aimed at strengthening the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime and at implementing article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and that they should complement and strengthen the Treaty.

In addition, the Working Group recommended that States should consider implementing as appropriate the various measures, as suggested in the report, that could contribute to taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, including but not limited to:

- a) transparency measures related to the risks associated with existing nuclear weapons, such as the provision of standardized information at regular intervals on the number, type and status of nuclear warheads in possession or within their territories, and measures taken to reduce risks, de-alert or reduce the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems;

- b) measures to reduce and eliminate the risk of accidental, mistaken, unauthorised or intentional nuclear weapon detonations, such as practical measures to reduce the number of deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons, to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines and to ensure the protection of nuclear weapons command and control systems from cyber threats; and
- c) additional measures to increase awareness and understanding of the complexity of and interrelationship between the wide range of humanitarian consequences that would result from any nuclear detonation, such as the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation education, the inclusion of information on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as on the consequences of nuclear testing, including in the South Pacific and elsewhere, in history textbooks, the promotion of efforts to raise awareness at the grassroots level about the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons across national borders and generations and including on interconnected issues such as sustainable development, the environment, climate change, the protection of cultural heritage, human rights, humanitarian action, children's rights, public health and gender, and ensuring greater emphasis on the unique impact of nuclear weapons on the health of women and girls.

Other recommendations were also made, including the immediate return to substantive work in the CD through the adoption of a comprehensive and balanced programme of work; facilitating further major reductions in nuclear arsenals, including efforts to reduce levels of hostility and tension between States – particularly between those possessing nuclear weapons; strengthening nuclear-weapons-free zones and establishing new ones, including, as a priority, in the Middle East including through the implementation of the 1995 NPT Resolution on the Middle East; and ceasing all efforts to upgrade and modernize existing nuclear weapons in ways that result in new military capabilities or enable new military missions.

These measures are important in their own right and States should consider what should and can be implemented, particularly as interim steps as we move towards a world without nuclear weapons.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are now therefore at a critical juncture in history.

As the Working Group noted, progress in multilateral nuclear disarmament has been slow to date, with concerns being raised regarding the serious challenges faced by the existing United Nations disarmament machinery, including, inter alia, the Conference on Disarmament, which has not been able to carry out negotiations pursuant to an agreed programme of work in two decades and the United Nations Disarmament Commission, which has not produced a substantive outcome since 1999, as well as the review process of the NPT, which failed to reach agreement on a substantive final document in 2015.

It is now up to the international community to choose the way forward.

As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed in his message last month marking the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, “[t]here are many paths to a world free of nuclear weapons. What matters is that all States act now, without delay, to fulfil their disarmament and non-proliferation commitments. ... Our very survival depends upon it.”

I thank you.
