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71st Session UNGA First Committee

Side event (Room 7), 13h15-14h30

“Multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament – ways forward”

Moderator’s remarks

Hello everyone

First of all, let me welcome you to this lunchtime side-event on behalf of the organizers. These are the Permanent Missions of Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam, along with the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

My name is John Borrie, and I’m UNIDIR’s Chief of Research. I’ll be your moderator for today’s event.

The topic of today’s discussion is on ways forward for multilateral negotiations for nuclear disarmament. Many States have begun to concentrate on this problem with renewed urgency. Reasons include the perceived lack of progress in traditional nuclear disarmament forums in recent years, and growing concerns and new evidence about the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons, including potential accidents in handling them.

It’s notable, then, that the 2015 session of the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution (A/RES/70/33) mandating an open-ended working group to be convened in Geneva in 2016. The OEWG’s mandate is worth briefly reiterating, to:

‘substantively address concrete effective legal measures, legal provisions and norms that will need to be concluded to attain and maintain a world without nuclear weapons’

and to:

‘also substantively address recommendations on other measures 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; (b) measures to reduce and eliminate the risk of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional nuclear weapon detonations; 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.’

This OEWG met in three sessions in 2016, culminating in a report submitted to the First Committee during the 71st Session UNGA. The OEWG wasn’t without controversy, as the nuclear-armed states chose not to attend, and the August 2016 report went to a vote. However,

paragraphs 66 to 68 of the OEWG report contained significant recommendations, which I'll leave to our panellists to outline* .

Taken together, it means that this October 2016 session of the First Committee is an important juncture for multilateral nuclear disarmament efforts. It's here that the international community will decide on how to move forward on the OEWG report recommendations—or not.

Today, we have 3 objectives

1. To obtain an overview of what has occurred in the OEWG in 2016;
2. To discuss the nature of possible steps following the recommendations of the OEWG, including the main elements that a nuclear weapons prohibition treaty might contain;
3. To discuss how these elements would relate to the current nuclear landscape including the NPT and recent humanitarian initiatives.

To kick-start our discussions, we have a very well qualified panel, whose composition I will describe in a moment. However, to begin with we will have welcoming remarks from Ambassador Virichai Plasai, Thailand's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, and Mr. Tom Markram, Director of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament.

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We have three very well qualified panellists today. The first is

H.E. Mr. Thani Thongpakdi of the Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations in Geneva, chaired the OEWG. He is ideally placed to offer an overview of its deliberations.

Our second panellist, Dr. Gro Nystuen of the International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI) in Oslo, is an esteemed legal expert on nuclear weapons. In addition to co-editing the recent commentary *Nuclear Weapons under International Law*, she co-authored—along with myself and others—a February 2016 ILPI-UNIDIR study entitled *A Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons: A Guide to the Issues*. Gro will share her views on possible elements of effective legal measures.

Our third panellist, **Mr. Tim Caughley**, was also a co-author of the prohibition study, and has written widely on nuclear disarmament processes both before and since, including as a contributor to UNIDIR's series of three background briefs on the OEWG. Tim will share his extensive experience and views on possible ways forward for multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament, drawing in particular on the third of these briefs, which he wrote. You can download that paper from UNIDIR's website.

Following our speakers, we will have opportunity for discussion.

I now turn to our first speaker, Ambassador Thongpakdi.

* The OEWG's report reaffirmed the NPT's importance among its recommendations, and that the pursuit of any nuclear disarmament measures should complement and strengthen the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime (paragraph 66). The report also recommended that states should consider implementing the various different measures the OEWG had discussed (paragraph 68) to promote transparency, reduce risks of accidental or unauthorized detonation, and promote the understanding of humanitarian consequences. In addition, the OEWG report recommends a path forward for multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations that the UNGA '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' (paragraph 67).