Statement by

H.E. Mr. Kai Sauer
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to the United Nations

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(check against delivery)
I take the floor on behalf of the Nordic countries - Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

Introduction

The First Committee is having this debate against the backdrop of continuing international tension. We feel this very strongly also in Europe. The Nordic Countries emphasize that the current situation makes disarmament and non-proliferation all the more urgent. We consider the rule of law a guiding principle in international affairs including in disarmament and non-proliferation commitments. The international community needs to find ways to increase transparency, build confidence and both lay the ground for and pursue further action.

Nuclear

The Nordic countries subscribe to the humanitarian perspective in the debate on nuclear weapons. The horrific memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 70 years ago are testimonies of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use - accidental, unauthorized or deliberate. We look forward to a continued dialogue to take this matter further.

Working to achieve and maintain a world free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is a responsibility of every State in the world. We subscribe to a world free of nuclear weapons and to the principle of effective disarmament.

We need to develop unity of purpose. It is essential that States possessing nuclear weapons engage in unilateral, bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral processes to rid the world of nuclear weapons. We call on the nuclear weapon states to negotiate and finalize further and deeper cuts in their nuclear arsenals, giving due consideration also to the disarmament of non-strategic nuclear weapons

We regret that the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was not able to agree on an outcome document. NPT remains a key pillar of international security and we urge all countries to sign and ratify the Treaty. We now need to move forward with our efforts to achieve tangible results on non-proliferation and disarmament. We call upon all states to participate in these efforts.

In the current 70th session of the First Committee we have a shared responsibility to act constructively to promote initiatives that can make an impact in bringing a world free of nuclear weapons closer.

We regret that the conference on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction has not been convened. However, the goal of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction remains as crucial as ever.
During the last review cycle, through the efforts of Ambassador Jaakko Laajava, a channel was open for regional dialogue on issues of primary importance for the security of the Middle East. Hopefully, the dialogue will continue.

We should work on mechanisms that can take nuclear disarmament forward in an effective, systematic and results-oriented way. One option on the table is an Open Ended Working Group established by the General Assembly. Such an Open ended working group should be inclusive, open to the participation of all countries. It is especially important that those countries possessing nuclear weapons constructively engage in the work of the group.

We continue to call on all states to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and especially those eight countries needed for the treaty to enter into force. Negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty should be launched without delay. The report of the Group of Governmental Experts provides further impetus for such negotiations. We are ready to engage substantively on this matter.

De-alerting nuclear weapon systems would decrease risks, contribute to increased confidence between States and can lead to disarmament, and we therefore urge all countries with nuclear weapons to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons.

The International Partnership on Nuclear Verification Disarmament is an important contribution to achieve real progress on Article VI of the NPT and an example of concrete work that can build capacity and confidence and help put in place technical building blocks for nuclear disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons.

The Nuclear Security Summit has been highly important in securing, reducing and eliminating nuclear and radioactive materials. It has made the world more secure, and it is important that this effort is carried on beyond 2016.

Iran

We welcome the recent Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program which is a historic achievement for global disarmament. We look forward to the swift implementation by Iran of all its commitments in relation to the JCPOA and expect Iran to engage fully with the IAEA to resolve all outstanding issues, including on the Possible Military Dimension, in order to build international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme. We also encourage Iran to proceed swiftly to ratify the Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement.
We give our full support to the IAEA in implementing the necessary verification and monitoring of Iran's nuclear-related commitments as set out in the JCPOA. And we encourage countries to support the IAEA's work in this regard – both politically and financially.

Chemical

The international mission to remove and destruct Syria's chemical weapons program was unprecedented. This is the first time a country's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction has been removed in such a way. The Nordic countries are proud of having contributed to this end.

We are deeply concerned about the use of chlorine as a weapon as well as alleged use of mustard gas. Any use of sulfur mustard or other chemical-warfare agent in the conflict is against Chemical Weapons Convention and customary humanitarian law. We welcome that the OPCW Fact Finding Mission will continue its work on establishing facts in this regard. We also welcome the United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 on establishing a Joint Investigative Mechanism of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to determine responsibility for the use of chemicals as a weapon in Syria. We call on all parties to cooperate fully with the investigation.

We urge the countries not Party to the Convention to accede and become members of the OPCW. Moreover, State Parties that have not fully implemented the Convention are urged to do so. Fostering international cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemistry and to prevent terrorism are important goals, especially today.

Biological

The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) is a cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, and embodies a global norm against the development and use of such weapons. The Nordic countries recognize that biotechnology is rapidly evolving and that ambitious and forward-looking initiatives are required to strengthen the BTWC. In the process leading up to the 8th Review Conference, we believe States Parties should focus on areas where unity is possible, and on pragmatic steps that can strengthen the Convention in a constructive manner including improved national implementation, confidence building measures, assistance and protection, universalization of the Treaty and deepened collaboration of scientific and disarmament communities.
The Ebola outbreak in West-Africa was a strong reminder of the dangers represented by the spread of communicable diseases. The Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) represents a joint effort by nations, international organizations, and civil society to accelerate progress toward a world safe and secure from infectious disease threats by i.a. implementing the 2005 International Health Regulations. The Global Health Security Agenda aims at stronger response against biological threats and better preparedness in case of a major health emergency.

The Nordic countries also collaborate with the United Nations and other partners to keep the Secretary General’s investigative mechanism operational, so that any allegations of use of biological weapons may be investigated promptly as a basis for appropriate action.

Conventional

After years of hard work the Arms Trade Treaty finally entered into force in December last year. The Nordic countries welcome the substantive outcome of the First Conference of State Parties. It provides a solid foundation for a functioning ATT regime.

The ATT is a significant achievement for the international community. Designed to provide norms for responsible trade in conventional arms, it does much more. One landmark feature is that the ATT introduces the concept of serious acts of Gender-Based Violence as a factor to take into account when making export assessments. The ATT also provides the international community with a new tool to address unregulated and illicit trade in conventional arms, by increasing the number of countries applying controls in this area. It is now in our hands to universalize the treaty and ensure effective implementation. The Nordic Countries will work towards meeting these challenges and ensuring robust reporting and high levels of transparency as envisaged in the treaty. It is important to build on the success of the ATT.

When it comes to human suffering here and now, small arms and light weapons bear the brunt of the responsibility. Tackling the misuse, illicit and unregulated trade of these weapons, and their ammunition, are paramount to securing the conditions for development. In this regard the Nordic countries welcome the UN Security Council Resolution 2220 (2015). Further work is also needed in the area of arms transports for the same purpose. We will continue to work hard to ensure full implementation of international instruments aiming to control these weapons - not least regarding ammunition, because without ammunition, weapons are inoperable.

The Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines has been instrumental in bringing down the number of accidents and injuries caused by anti-personnel mines and in making previously unusable land useable for agriculture The Convention to-date has 162 States Parties and near-universal adherence to the norm it has established. The use of anti-personnel mines is stigmatized and clearance of contaminated areas and stockpile destruction have made significant progress.
The Nordic Countries strive to develop innovative methods in humanitarian mine action. Victim assistance must be part of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and be integrated into overall health care efforts.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions has through its prohibition, succeeded in reducing human suffering caused by this weapon. It has set a strong norm against this indiscriminate weapon. Yet, we are deeply concerned about the reported use of cluster munitions affecting civilian populations in certain parts of the world. We call upon all actors to refrain from such use and to fully observe the principles of International Humanitarian Law. The Dubrovnik Action Plan gives the States Parties to the convention effective tools to guide their work over the next five years.

The Nordic countries remain strongly committed to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and its Protocols. Universalization and compliance with the provisions of the Convention and its annexed Protocols are issues of high importance. The CCW is a forum that brings together expertise from many different fields and enables us to address a wide variety of issues, both long standing and newly emerging. We believe that humans should always bear the ultimate responsibility when dealing with questions of life and death. As States we have an obligation to assess the legality of new weapons, and we therefore welcome a continued discussion of lethal autonomous weapon systems, LAWS within the framework of the CCW.

Space

The use of space has provided, and is providing, tremendous benefits to development and human welfare all over the world: from navigation to long-range communication; time synchronization to earth observation; and more. At the same time these benefits have also created a dependency and spurred more actors to conduct activities in the space environment.

This also carries risks. In the absence of international rules of the road we could experience more misunderstandings, accidents and, possibly, conflicts in the space environment. We have also seen an increase of space-debris, stemming from accidents, or deliberate destruction of space objects, which threatens the long-term use of outer space.

The Nordic countries believe that international rules are needed to make sure space activities are conducted in a safe and sustainable manner. That could include an international code of conduct for activities in outer space and also other initiatives of more binding nature. We look forward to discuss this issue further during our deliberations.
Gender

We, the Nordic Countries, believe that it is important and timely to improve the gender balance in the sphere of disarmament and non-proliferation. Equal participation of men and women in disarmament analyses, delegations, discussions and decisions would increase the legitimacy, quality and effectiveness of disarmament agreements. There are not many low hanging fruits in disarmament and non-proliferation but this surely is one.

UNIDIR

The United Nations Disarmament Research Institute UNIDIR has been instrumental for the disarmament community in providing research and expertise. The Nordic Countries have supported UNIDIR in words and deeds. We support efforts to find a durable funding structure for UNIDIR.

Finally Mr Chairman,

The Nordic countries aim to promote common understanding of today’s disarmament, arms control and proliferation challenges as well as concrete measures to address these challenges. We underline the need to uphold and strengthen the rule of law in international affairs. We strive to work to achieve these goals in the 70th session of the First Committee.