Explanation of vote by Sweden on L.41, Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations

Chairperson,

I take the floor to explain the vote of Sweden on draft resolution L. 41 “Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations”.

Our delegation has voted in favour of the resolution. To accurately convey our full view on this matter, we deem it important to put our vote into a wider context.

In a deteriorating security environment progress in nuclear disarmament is more important and urgent than ever. Still, the deadlock of recent years remains, as symbolized by the failure of the NPT 2015 Review Conference and the fact that CTBT has not yet entered into force. The frustration with this lack of progress is widespread. The Swedish Government shares this disappointment.

Our basic perspective, like so many others, is the humanitarian one. We are supportive of any effective legal measure that would make a difference, leading to effective disarmament.

At one level, the issue is clear-cut: our overarching goal is disarmament leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. This is also the main motivation for our support for the resolution.

At another level, the issue is highly complex. Will this process be the most efficient way to achieve the goal of full nuclear disarmament? The fact is that we do not know today. But given the stakes involved, we believe we have an obligation to try, mindful of the challenges involved.

We do not subscribe to the notion that there is a legal gap within existing treaty law which has to be filled. The NPT remains the indispensable cornerstone on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. A ban treaty could complement and reinforce – not replace – current law and treaties, not least as a legal instrument for the implementation of Article VI of the NPT. States engaging in the negotiations and eventually acceding to a ban have a responsibility and a legal obligation to remain fully committed to the NPT and to ensure that its implementation is taken forward.

Today’s vote constitutes an important and a clear stance against what we regard as an increasingly dangerous status quo. That said, it is only the very beginning of a process. The key part of the process will be the actual negotiations during which the scope of a future treaty will have to be discussed and agreed. Here, disarmament as well as broader security and defence policy considerations will have to be taken into account.

Sweden will take part in these negotiations, as we sincerely hope the vast majority of others will do. Any treaty’s effectiveness – the key criteria against which it will be judged – will hinge on the broadest possible adherence. To make this possible, the negotiations should be conducted in a spirit of inclusiveness and bridge building, including with the nuclear weapon states.

While pursuing this track, we remain equally open to other initiatives. Sweden does not see a ban treaty as the only available legal option and, as the Open Ended Working Group report indicated, there is no shortage of ideas. Several of them deserve to be further explored as we move forward.