Measures to reduce nuclear risks and pave the way for nuclear disarmament

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Your Excellencies,

In this presentation we want to underline the importance of the Open-Ended Working Group recommendations on legal measures, nuclear risk reduction and transparency - the recommendations made in paragraphs 66 and 68 of the OEWG report which appeared to receive unanimous support - in addition to the recommendation for negotiations of a legal agreement to prohibit nuclear weapons, which deserves the widest support.

With regard to reducing the risks of nuclear weapons use, we call in particular on the US and Russia to stand-down their land-based ICBM forces so that presidents no longer have to make potentially apocalyptic decisions in minutes, based on incoming missile warnings that might be spurious, or arising out of conflicts that escalate along with nuclear threat postures.

Resolutions in First Committee urging such a stand-down include Reducing Nuclear Dangers and Operational readiness of Nuclear Weapon Systems, which deserve the widest support.

Risk reduction measures are of truly existential, human survival, significance. We are now in a time of increasing tensions between nuclear powers, reminiscent of the great-power jostling of 1914, but with the added risk of nuclear weapons poised to be used.

Today, in Syria, the U.S., Russia and France - three nuclear-armed nations – are bombing side-by-side and on different sides. An accidental or intentional military incident could send the world spiraling into a disastrous nuclear confrontation. Recent bombing attacks on neutral hospitals remind us that in the chaos of war such incidents are all too common. Other possibilities of uncontrolled escalation exist in the Baltic States, Ukraine, South China Sea, South Asia, the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere.

Both Russia and the US have conducted nuclear-weapons exercises in Europe, elevating the risks of a nuclear catastrophe. Nuclear risks are in fact now being
escalated, not reduced. It is imperative that provocative deployments and exercises cease.

There are a range of other risk reduction measures that can be taken as noted by the OEWG and by Generals Cartwright and Zolotarev at the OEWG, notably making land-based ICBMs unavailable for instant launch and adopting policies never to use nuclear weapons first. We are encouraged that some nuclear-armed States have already adopted no-first-use policies, and urge others to do the same. No-first-use policies should be accompanied by a recognition of a norm of non-use and the incompatibility of use of nuclear weapons with international humanitarian law.

All nuclear-armed states are modernizing their arsenals. Rather than relying more on nuclear weapons in such tense times, nuclear-reliant countries should be encouraged to utilize the legal and cooperative security mechanisms of the United Nations and of regional organisations in order to resolve or manage conflicts, monitor ceasefires, verify disarmament and render nuclear weapons unnecessary for security.

The parliaments of nuclear armed and nuclear reliant States have called for this in consensus resolutions adopted by the Inter Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

We urge nuclear armed governments to eliminate reliance on nuclear weapons and ensure that humanity is not destroyed by accident, miscalculation or intent. We are lucky to have made it this far. Prohibition leading to abolition, AND risk reduction do not so much make history as make history possible.