Statement delivered by

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at the

High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament
New York
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Madam President,

I would like to align Ireland with the statements on behalf of the European Union and the New Agenda Coalition. To these I would add the following comments in a national capacity.

One of the most important outcomes of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference was that Conference’s expression, in its final document, of deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. While this expression of concern did not find its way into the 2010 RevCon’s 64 point Action Plan, it nevertheless offers us a powerful means by which we can reframe our entire debate about nuclear weapons.

The so-called "humanitarian consequences" narrative steps beyond traditional disarmament Treaty discussions to consider, first and foremost, the practical effects on mankind of any nuclear weapons detonation. These consequences would involve death and suffering on an unprecedented scale among our civilian populations. They would wreak incalculable damage upon our environment, our ecological and agricultural systems, our economies and our way of life as we know it.

Ireland is very pleased to associate itself by name with the humanitarian consequences narrative which has re-emerged again within the current NPT review cycle.

We believe that the humanitarian imperative for nuclear weapons disarmament is written into the DNA of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is why we have the Treaty.
In October 1958, when my country first requested the UN General Assembly to study the implications of what we then called the further dissemination of nuclear weapons, we were not concerned with the creation of treaty rules for the sake of creating treaty rules. We were concerned with stemming the wholesale proliferation of a class of weapon the destructive capacity of which remains to this day unparalleled in human history. As early as 1955, the most eminent of nuclear physicists, Albert Einstein among them, were quite clear in telling us that a war involving these weapons could put an end to the human race. They described the prospect of "universal death, sudden only for a minority, for the majority a slow torture of disease and disintegration."

Is this the best blueprint for international peace and security which we can devise?

Today, the re-emergence of the humanitarian consequences narrative offers each of us an opportunity to return to first principles. We must at all costs prevent the proliferation of these inhumane weapons and press for complete nuclear disarmament. We must restate our commitment to achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons.

Today is an opportunity to reaffirm our political commitment to that objective. Let us not waste the opportunity.

Progress in achieving nuclear disarmament has been too slow. Ireland and its New Agenda Coalition partners see a direct causal link between attempts to justify the retention of these weapons and possible attempts to acquire them. To break the causal link, we must first acknowledge that, as the UN Secretary General has put it so eloquently, there are simply no right hands for the wrong weapons.

It is for all states to seek complete nuclear disarmament, but only the nuclear weapons states can disarm.

Humanity has demonstrated itself capable of revising its assessment of weapons once considered, even by a minority, to have a legitimate value. The international community has recently conveyed, rightly, its sense of complete revulsion at the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and, for the vast majority of UN member states, the days of chemical weapons as weapons of war are over.

So too, we believe, are the days of nuclear weapons. They are different to chemical weapons only in that they are more indiscriminate and more devastating.

For far too long, we have allowed process to trump progress in nuclear disarmament negotiations. Let us venture now to put the emphasis instead on making progress. We are united in our aim to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons. Let us work together to make that aim a reality.

Thank you.