ICAN Statement

UN Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament

Transparency with respect to nuclear arsenals

Delivered by Linnet Ngayu
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is a great privilege to address the working group this morning on behalf of the African Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace, a partner organization of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Allow me to begin by thanking Ambassador De Klerk for his informative presentation.

Transparency and openness are essential not only for the success of disarmament, but also for democracy. Without transparency, how are citizens to evaluate whether their governments are fulfilling their duties under the Non-Proliferation Treaty? How are we to hold them to account for their continued inaction?

It is deeply regrettable that several of the States here today are unwilling even to confess that they host nuclear weapons on their soil. They withhold that information not only from ordinary citizens, but also from lawmakers. What does that say about the strength of their democracies? What does it say about the state of our international disarmament regime?

This opaque practice is entirely unacceptable. The nuclear-free States in this room must not stand for it any longer. What hope is there for a fruitful exchange of views if States harbouring nuclear weapons refuse to declare that they are doing so? Their Cold War policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on their territory must be abandoned – now.

We demand to know: what is the location, the number, the status and the type of these weapons? What vehicles would be used to deliver them to their targets? From States that permit the transit of nuclear weapons through their territory or airspace – we demand to know: when, how often, along which routes, and at what risk to your own citizens, and to the citizens of the world?
These are fundamental questions – reasonable questions – that must not go unanswered. We routinely implore nuclear-armed States to be more transparent with respect to their nuclear arsenals. But transparency is the responsibility of all States that claim protection from these immoral, downright immoral devices.

What steps are the States here taking to diminish the role and significance of nuclear weapons in their military doctrines? What has been achieved, in this respect, over the four and a half decades since the NPT became law? We wish to see regular, standardized reporting to the General Assembly on these and other pertinent questions. It is time for States to practise what they preach.

The existence of nuclear weapons anywhere is a threat to peace and security and humanity. For would-be victims of a nuclear attack, it makes no difference whether the weapon is detonated by a host State or a possessor State. The catastrophic humanitarian consequences are the same.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by stressing that, while transparency is certainly necessary for the attainment of disarmament, it is not itself disarmament. Sharing information about one’s nuclear arsenal is not the same as consigning it to the dustbin of history. To achieve a world free of nuclear weapons, legal measures are also needed – the most urgent of which is a ban treaty. We look forward to joining like-minded States – several months from now – at a negotiating conference to achieve this outcome.

Thank you.