Remarks on behalf of ICAN, delivered by Thomas Nash, Director, Article 36
Role of nuclear weapons in the security and other contexts of the 21st century

Thank you Chairperson

- As we look at the destruction and mass displacement wrought by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas; at the continued flow of arms to fuel conflicts around the world; and at the potential development of autonomous weapons, there are all too many reasons to be concerned with security in the 21st century.
- Nuclear weapons are one of them.
- When discussing nuclear weapons, we would be wary of any framing in which humanitarian and security considerations exist in some kind of simplistic binary dynamic – others have made useful points here on that today.
- Our motivation as a global campaign to ban nuclear weapons stems from a will to live in a more secure and a more humane world – security is not security without humanity.
- It is not, as I think some have perhaps contended, that those promoting a prohibition do not appreciate and understand the wide range of security considerations that states hold in relation to nuclear weapons.
- Rather it is that those in favour of prohibition, have a somewhat different conception of security than the governments that possess or seek security from them.

Chairperson

- We would contend that nuclear weapons distort the security of the countries that have them or use them in their security doctrines.
- This distortion of security manifests in a couple of ways, from our perspective.
- Firstly, the multi-billion dollar nuclear weapons establishments distract from more immediate security concerns that the people in those countries actually face.
- And, as some have said, the idea of deterrence is as much an illusion of security as anything, with no credible military utility discernable from a situation in which states make suicidal threats against each other while maintaining arsenals of thousands of nuclear bombs and missiles that constitute an inherently unsustainable risk to us all.
- But secondly and perhaps more importantly, nuclear weapons force states into an automatically adversarial relationship in which they threaten each other with the most destructive technologies of violence we have been able to develop as human beings.
- These weapons lock states into security concepts that have proved very difficult to shift – the impasse in disarmament work by the nuclear-armed states and indeed their boycott of this meeting, are a testament to this.
- Fortunately, many states, by far the majority of states, have managed to avoid falling into this trap. Some such states live next door to nuclear-armed or allied states.
- Most states in fact consider the existence of nuclear weapons to be a major, certainly one of the greatest threats to global security today.
- The risks that have been set out at this meeting, including the growing risks from cyber attacks, deterioration of the broader security situation and straightforward threats of use of nuclear weapons from states that wield them, only heighten concerns about the way in which nuclear weapons undermine our collective security as human societies.

Chairperson

- We recognise that certain states continue to choose to embed the potential use of weapons of mass destruction in their security doctrines and seemingly see no way out of this choice as it stands today.
- Like many others, we of course disagree with this choice, but we certainly don’t ignore it or brush it aside. On the contrary, we are working hard to change it.
- At the same time, we would encourage those states that seek security from nuclear weapons to recognise the different conceptions of security that also exist.
- We would invite all states to try to think about how a new legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons can have a positive impact on global security.
- It would reaffirm and solidify the general political and legal rejections of nuclear weapons that exist today, reducing any space for them to be perceived as legitimate.
- It would reinforce the rules and norms against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- It is not designed to be a quick fix, but would be a catalyst, as Malaysia said, that might help states to break out of the nuclear-armed trap in which they find themselves.

Chairperson

- We were puzzled and somewhat dismayed by some of the statements this morning, including a framing suggested by Poland in which the development of a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons will undermine the NPT. As far as we know, nobody in favour of prohibiting nuclear weapons is seeking to do this. On the contrary, the will to develop such a treaty is about reaffirming the rejection of nuclear weapons, in a way that is consistent with many states’ interpretation of their obligations under the NPT. There are different interpretations of these obligations of course, but no actual evidence that a ban treaty would undermine the NPT.
- In fact, the only people making this argument are those opposed to the negotiation of a new legally-binding instrument on nuclear weapons. There is something rather perverse about those who seem unwilling to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security asserting that a prohibition on these weapons would undermine the NPT. In a context where such an instrument looks set to be developed and will then co-exist with the existing obligations under the NPT, it seems unwise to assert that this treaty will
undermine the NPT. We would hope this assertion is simply a rhetorical device aimed at deterring states from pursuing such a treaty and that once the ban is in place, it will not be pitted against the NPT, but rather seen as a way to reinforce its rules against nuclear weapons.

Chairperson

- At a wider level nuclear weapons, wielded by a powerful minority, are a symbol of global injustice and extreme violence and inhumanity.
- The existence and relentless modernisation of nuclear weapons reinforce these concepts of global injustice, violence and inhumanity.
- Against the background of an alarming global security situation, any efforts to challenge the dominance of these negative concepts should be welcomed by all.
- The commencement of a diplomatic process to negotiate a legally-binding instrument that will prohibit nuclear weapons now appears within reach.
- The outcome of this diplomatic process, as well as the process itself, will provide a strong challenge to the insecurity that nuclear weapons entail.
- Clearly some see no role for themselves in this process, nor any value in such a process. Some even feel comfortable asserting with absolute omniscient certainty that it will never have its desired effect.
- Surely, though, these states cannot really expect those that reject nuclear weapons to hold back from developing a treaty to prohibit them, simply because one group of states does not consider itself in a position to reject these weapons.
- We would hope that in time those states currently locked into a nuclear-armed security straightjacket will come to see the prohibition treaty as a helpful contribution to a more positive global security, one that is not weighed down by concepts of global injustice, extreme violence and inhumanity.

Thank you Chairperson.