Norwegian Statement

Open-ended Working Group – May 2013

Mr Chairman

Norway is pleased that the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on “Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations", established pursuant to UNGA Resolution A/67/56, is now a reality. The resolution, in our view, should be seen on the background of strong frustration over the lack of substantive multilateral progress in the area of nuclear disarmament and the strong resolve of a majority of states to move the disarmament agenda forward. It is our sincere hope that the working group, giving all UN member states, as well as the civil society, the opportunity to participate, and with the objective to have an interactive dialogue, could be a contribution to necessary new dynamics in the multilateral nuclear disarmament discourse.

We are very grateful that Ambassador Manuel Dengo of Costa Rica has taken on the chairmanship, and we are looking forward to working under your leadership. Please count on Norway’s full support. Furthermore, we would like to thank you for the provisional program of work, which looks very interesting and relevant with panelists that will accommodate good discussions and give more attention to aspects of this subject matter that deserve more attention.

In 2013, our main focus has been on the “why” of nuclear disarmament. Earlier this year we discussed the humanitarian consequences of nuclear detonations in Oslo. We are fully convinced of the necessity to devote increased attention to the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. The realities on the ground must guide our efforts if we are to achieve meaningful progress and respond adequately to the situation. This perspective should guide our work and be the basis for future proposals on how to promote nuclear disarmament.

There is a need to demystify nuclear weapons and to start addressing these weapons from the perspectives of their impact on the ground, long term effects, military utility and compatibility with laws of warfare. Nuclear weapons do differ from other weapons in one respect - they have the potential to affect all states, wherever they are used. They are a global threat and require a global response, and we are all stakeholders. Nuclear disarmament concerns all states, and is indeed also the responsibility of all states. We are convinced that working together like this, in an informal environment with states, civil society and a broad range of experts in the field will prove to be fruitful and can help us towards our common goal; a world free of nuclear weapons.

The mandate of the Open-ended Working Group is to “develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons” (...) and “to submit a report on its work, reflecting discussions held and all proposals made, to the General Assembly at its 68th session (...).” Keeping in mind the mandate, we should aim for out of the box-thinking. Or, perhaps we could say “out of the bubble”-thinking? In our view an important prerequisite to making progress would be to bring disarmament issues out of isolation and connect them to the wider security and development challenges we are facing in a changing world.
In this context, our discussion should not be a discussion on the “disarmament machinery” as we know it. The question is rather what the UN system, or the multilateral system in an even wider sense, can bring to these issues, taking all relevant substantive bodies of expertise into account.

Mr Chair,

A new sense of urgency governs our work in this area. When South Africa during the NPT PrepCom recently read out a joint statement on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons on behalf of 80 countries, it was a clear sign that the humanitarian approach is increasingly resonating among States and that the issue is now well established. We cannot approach nuclear weapons through a strategy of denial. As long as the probability of a nuclear weapons detonation exists, the consequences of such an event means it must be a humanitarian concern.

Let us use the opportunity in the Open-ended Working Group to explore number of aspects of nuclear disarmament and the challenges we face. We should bear in mind that this is a one off-event, and we should thus take full advantage of this unique opportunity. Increased knowledge and unbiased discussions will hopefully be a step in the right direction.

Thank you.