General Debate

Statement by

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Check against Delivery
Mr. Chairman

Ireland aligns with the statements made by the European Union, by the New Agenda Coalition and by the Vienna Group of Ten.

Ireland would like to congratulate you on your chairmanship of our committee and to wish you well in your important work. I would also like to thank you for the inclusive and useful preparatory consultations which you have undertaken, building on the work of Ambassador Henk Cor Van der Kwast whose excellent draft Chairman’s summary from last year gives us a solid foundation for our vital work over the next two weeks. Let me assure you Mr Chairman of my delegation’s intention to give you and your bureau every assistance in bringing our work to a successful conclusion, including by keeping within your time limits!

Ireland also welcomes the strong representation from Civil Society at the conference and believes their expertise and full and active engagement will enrich our discussions here.

Mr Chairman,
In 1958, when Ireland’s Foreign Minister, Frank Aiken, introduced to the United Nations the first of the Irish resolutions which would eventually lead to the adoption of the non-proliferation Treaty ten years later, the prospect of a world where many actors, States and non-State, would eventually acquire the means and the technology to build their own nuclear arsenals was very real. In that speech, which remains as prescient and true today as it was sixty years ago, Frank Aiken speaks of how “Weapons, which are the monopoly of the great powers today, become the weapons of smaller powers and revolutionary groups tomorrow”.

As the NPT reaches 50, we can agree that the Treaty has achieved many of its objectives. Very few States have remained outside the Treaty and gone on to develop Nuclear Weapons. The Five Nuclear Weapons States have all joined it and are therefore bound by the commitment contained within its Article VI to nuclear disarmament which remains the core legal obligation binding the nuclear weapons States to disarm, a commitment reiterated by the unequivocal undertaking they gave in 2000 to accomplish the total abolition of their nuclear weapons.

Additionally, the States of many regions of the world, have chosen to be part of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones, in strong demonstration of
their commitment to the objective of a world without nuclear weapons. More recently, almost two thirds of the UN membership voted last July to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The NPT itself is a slim Treaty, its preamble and 11 Articles fitting easily on 6 A4 pages. But the international community has built around it a strong framework of supporting institutions. The International Atomic Energy Agency, in particular, though predating and independent from the NPT, has built up an impressive structure of expertise and an enabling framework to facilitate the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes while implementing strict safeguards which prevent diversion to non-peaceful uses. Likewise, the CTBTO has greatly strengthened and enhanced the norm against nuclear testing, particularly through the development of the international monitoring system.

With the development of supporting export control regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime, States have been successfully assisted in preventing and inhibiting proliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology without preventing transfers of technology and materials for peaceful uses.
This aspect of the Treaty is also an essential one to which States Parties need to continue to give careful support and attention. Ireland has been pleased to co chair, with Iceland, the missile technology control regime this year and to have hosted a successful plenary meeting of the partners in Dublin last October.

The NPT has also helped to promote and give impetus to many far-reaching agreements and understandings aimed at preventing further proliferation and enabling bilateral nuclear disarmament including the welcome reductions achieved through the INF, START and NEW START treaties.

The adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons represents the NPT’s latest success story and the first new legal instrument on nuclear disarmament to be adopted in over 20 years. A success story not only because of the ground-breaking content of the Treaty, but because of what it entails in terms of progress towards the fulfilment of the NPT’s Disarmament provisions. Article VI of the NPT expressly envisaged a separate and complementary “treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and
effective international control.” Ireland looks forward to the Treaty’s early entry into force so that it can begin its important work.

Mr Chairman,

In addition to the TPNW, there have been other welcome advances in nuclear disarmament and arms control in recent years, including in particular the JCPOA with Iran in 2015, a major achievement for the NPT and the international community.

But huge challenges confront us. The JCPOA, negotiated with such effort and attention, and despite careful and positive implementation assessment by the IAEA, is under threat.

Meanwhile, Nuclear Disarmament by the NPT Nuclear Weapons States has stalled. Bilateral nuclear disarmament between the US and Russian Federation, following the successes of the INF and New Start has halted. After the successful outcome of the NPT’s 2010 Review Conference and far-reaching Action Plan, the 2015 Review Conference did not agree an outcome. The CTBT has not entered into force and nuclear testing by DPRK has challenged and undermined the global norm against nuclear testing. Modernization and investment in nuclear arsenals is rising in all NWS and efforts to
reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in military doctrines and in nuclear alliances has receded. Proliferation threats are increasing with DPRK’s nuclear program, despite recent welcome developments, representing a particularly dangerous development.

Against this background the norm against the threat of use of nuclear weapons has been seriously eroded. Even more worryingly, consideration seems to be given to the use of nuclear weapons other than as a deterrent.

Against this challenging background, and in a moment when we have seen disarray and lack of agreement at the United Nations Security Council on an issue on which there should be overwhelming global agreement and abhorrence such as Chemical Weapons use, it seems utopian to suggest that we, the NPT State’s Parties should renew our efforts to engage with each other and genuinely find ways forward to overcome the divisions on approaches to nuclear disarmament which have become evident in recent years.

But that is exactly what we need to do. If the NPT could be negotiated and adopted at the height of the cold war, then a
renewed commitment to its implementation and the establishment of genuine dialogue among its States Parties is more than possible.

My colleague from New Zealand, speaking on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition has set out all the steps and actions to which we are all agreed and signed up to. Ireland is anxious to get down to work and make progress, within the NPT, on these issues. We look now Mr Chairman to the Nuclear Weapons States. With two years left in this Review Cycle the time for action is now. We would, given increasing international tensions, and the heightened risk of an actual nuclear weapons detonation with the catastrophic humanitarian consequences so clearly set out in the humanitarian initiative, particularly welcome work on risk reduction such as de-alerting, as a matter of urgency. We would also encourage the US and the Russian Federation, as the holders of the largest arsenals, to reengage on a successor agreement to New Start.

Another urgent issue is the question of The Middle East Zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Means of Delivery. As we reach the mid-point of the Review cycle with little or no progress, it is time for a serious stocktaking and reassessment of how we can achieve some progress, in spite of the challenges and difficulties on this issue. Otherwise, the risk that the 2020 Review Cycle will also
fail to agree an outcome is strong with a resulting strongly negative impact on the Treaty. Ireland will host a side event, with BASIC, on the Zone on May 1st and we look forward to engaging creatively with all interested parties then. Trust and confidence are key to the success of any negotiation, and this is what we need most of all.

To establish that trust, we need to begin a dialogue to find what can bring us nearer to the realization of our mutual goal, a world without nuclear weapons and a successful outcome to the 2020 Review cycle.

There are already some green shoots in the Chairman’s draft summary of last year’s preparatory meeting, including the recognition of gendered impacts of nuclear weapons and the need to increase women’s participation in nuclear disarmament forums. Ireland looks forward to launching our new Working Paper: Impact and Empowerment- the Role of gender in the NPT, at an event this evening.

This paper, and another working paper on Nuclear Weapons and Environmental Law which we will present with Chatham House at a side event on Friday are the latest work in our ongoing project “Nuclear Disarmament, the Missing Link in Multilateralism” which
aims to bring nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation out of the security and disarmament silos and connect them to the international community’s other high level goals.

Mr Chairman

Ireland continues to believe 60 years after Frank Aiken first set out his vision of a nuclear weapon free world, that such a world is possible. We believe that it is urgent, 50 years after the opening for signature of the NPT, that we all re-engage to achieve that world.

Speaking earlier this month on the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace to Northern Ireland after a long and bloody conflict, Ireland’s Deputy Prime Minister, Simon Coveney said “renewal does not demand perfection. It demands leadership, courage and hard work”. The NPT also requires leadership, courage and hard work and it needs it urgently.

Thank you