Statement to the 2018 Preparatory Committee of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

Thank you, Chair.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has been instrumental to address matters related to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. But it has failed to deliver on the goal of nuclear abolition, itself a foundational objective of the United Nations.

Today the question is not just whether the world is better with the NPT than without it, but whether this treaty will actually lead to complete nuclear disarmament. And the record is hardly promising.

Nuclear-weapon states extol the value of nuclear weapons in safeguarding their national interests, but expect no one else to embrace the same rationale. They demand immediate, consistent compliance with non-proliferation obligations, but disregard their own responsibility to disarm. They consider the pursuit and possession of nuclear weapons by some states unacceptable, but are content to accept the nuclear-weapons programs of military or economic allies, even outside the NPT framework.

The irony that the sole possessors of nuclear weapons within the NPT are the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations Security Council, which are tasked specifically with the maintenance of international peace and security, has not been lost.

But the P5 are not the only ones obstructing progress in abolishing nuclear weapons. States that participate in nuclear alliances, such as NATO, are wantonly complicit. They agree with nuclear-weapon states when they claim that they maintain their arsenals not only for their own security, but also for the security of their allies. Put simply: they give nuclear-weapons states cover.

For much too long, states under so-called nuclear umbrellas have been allowed to reside in two camps. When it suits, they present themselves as responsible international actors that are non-nuclear-weapon states under the NPT. At the same time, they are party to, and explicitly endorse, a security arrangement that runs contrary to the letter of the NPT and the broader goal of nuclear abolition.

The nuclear disarmament landscape was dramatically altered last year in New York, as newly-emboldened voices from all corners of the planet established a legal ban of the most dangerous weapons on Earth. Those voices will not be quelled, and cannot be wished away—whatever the position of outliers.

They will be heard at meetings of states parties to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty—such as this one—at sessions of the Conference on Disarmament, at the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security.

Most NATO members, as well as other nuclear-weapons endorsing states, boycotted the process that resulted in the adoption of the nuclear ban treaty, just as the United States had asked. In doing so, they undermined the very rules-based multilateral order they claim to support.

They continue to embrace nuclear deterrence as a valid security policy, effectively legitimizing the weapons held by its nuclear-armed allies. Now those allies are engaged in a multibillion-dollar modernization of their nuclear arsenals, which will inevitably extend the shelf-life of nuclear weapons and push the abolition goalpost even further.
How can this not be seen as contrary to the goal of nuclear abolition? How can the placement of U.S. nuclear weapons on the territories of NATO members be compatible with the objective, the spirit and the specific provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty? Does anyone really believe that proliferation concerns will ever be fully allayed while nuclear-weapons states obstinately cling to their arsenals?

These are not matters of opinion or interpretation. No reasonable observer—in or out of government—would characterize this behaviour as favourable to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

This much is certain: the value of the process that resulted in the adoption of the nuclear ban treaty at the United Nations last year goes far beyond the legal prohibition itself. It is ultimately an ongoing political struggle of the highest order.

States with nuclear weapons will only disarm—if they ever do—when they so choose. That odious reality is well understood. But no longer will they, or their nuclear-weapons endorsing allies, control the prevailing narrative around nuclear weapons. For a vast majority of nations, these already-illegitimate instruments of mass destruction are now and forever unambiguously illegal.

The determined opposition of those who fail to recognize the gravity of the nuclear weapons threat and the urgency of the nuclear abolition enterprise will not diminish the push for abolition, but rather energize it.

Here’s the thing: there is no path to nuclear abolition that avoids stiff, multifaceted opposition. Any and all efforts in this regard will need to overcome deeply entrenched political, economic and security interests.

We know that nuclear-weapon states, and those who endorse their policies, will dig in their heels—in fact, they already have. They will continue to refer to any effort that challenges the nuclear disarmament status quo as a “distraction.” They will point to progress where there is none. Perhaps most problematic, they will continue to refer to any serious plan to initiate and conclude a process to eliminate nuclear weapons as “premature.”

But, as the great Bob Marley once said, “you can fool some people sometimes, but you can’t fool all the people all the time.”

Chair, distinguished delegates:

We are fooled no more.

States in nuclear weapons alliances, even if officially considered non-nuclear weapons states under this treaty, are not only in a clear minority, but also on the wrong side of history and humanity.

Their purported support of nuclear abolition can only hold true in the most ethereal and non-committal way possible. Because today, in 2018, these states actually—and openly—support the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons by their allies.

* Delivered on April 25, 2018 by Cesar Jaramillo – Project Ploughshares, SEHLAC Network.