Statement by H.E. Archbishop Bernardito Auza
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Head of the Delegation of the Holy See to the
2019 Preparatory Committee for the
2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference
New York, 30 April 2019

Mr. Chair,

The Holy See congratulates you on your assumption of the Chairmanship of this third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference. The review will coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT, a cornerstone of global efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons and to establish a more peaceful and secure world. My Delegation pledges its full cooperation with you and all Delegations to ensure that all relevant preparations to make the review a success are completed.

Mr. Chair,

Deeply concerned about the present obstacles facing the international community in dealing with the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, the Holy See wishes to reiterate its firm conviction that “international relations cannot be held captive to military force, mutual intimidation, and the parading of stockpile of arms.”¹ Among the issues that warrant our urgent attention, my Delegation would like to mention four:

The first is the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The Holy See signed and ratified the Treaty during the 20 September 2017 signing ceremony, because the Treaty gives hope to this generation and to those still to be born that one day our world will be free from nuclear weapons, which, for more than seventy years, have daunted humanity’s aspirations for peace. The Holy See believes that it can promote and not distract from the goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. This objective still needs to be strengthened in some of its aspects, inter alia in the area of verification and the need of a competent international authority or authorities to negotiate and verify the irreversible elimination of nuclear-weapons programmes (Article 4.6).

The second concerns the landmark Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Prompt actions must be taken by its two principal parties to resolve compliance concerns so that the Treaty does not lapse on August 2 of this year. Despite efforts over several years to deal with

¹ Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the International Symposium “Prospects for a world free of nuclear weapons and for integral disarmament”, 10 November 2017.
these compliance issues, including attempts earlier this year, there has been no resolution. It is important for international peace and security that the principal parties resume negotiations without delay. They should subsequently meet to resolve similar issues related to the New START Treaty well before its expiration in early 2021, with a view to extending that Treaty for five years. Withdrawing from legally binding commitments that eliminate an entire category of missiles and establish limits on delivery systems and warheads cannot advance international stability or sustain the fragile balances the world has worked so hard to achieve since the end of the Second World War. Their security policies and those of their allies involve doctrines for the use of such weapons, which they maintain in various states of readiness for use within a few minutes. The interrelationships of these States brings into play concerns about other regions as well as the coupling of nuclear and conventional forces.

Since the threat of calamities visited upon humanity from the use of nuclear weapons arises above all from States possessing nuclear weapons, it is past time that States possessing them, including those not party to the NPT, begin dialogues and negotiations to establish binding limitations on all nuclear weapons and delivery systems globally and establishing a ceiling on each State’s nuclear weapons systems. Two States have established ceilings on their INF and strategic systems. Others should establish ceilings, perhaps beginning with ceilings on launchers, as was the case historically with the SALT I Interim Agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. Initial declarations can be verified by national and international technical means, but in due course more specific verification, involving on-site inspections, would be necessary, as is the case with the New START Treaty. The established ceilings would provide a basis for further reductions over time, bearing in mind the large differences in numbers, or announced ceilings on numbers, among the States involved. Their establishment would be an important step toward the global elimination of nuclear weapons, which must remain our ultimate objective.

The third concerns the Middle East. States in that region that have not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) should do so promptly. Some of those ratifications are required for the Treaty to enter into force. Some States need to incorporate their verification systems within the International Monitoring System, which is already functioning well. All States in the region should proceed urgently to negotiate a zone free of nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and ballistic missiles, as envisioned in the resolution on the Middle East accompanying the 1995 decision on the indefinite extension of the NPT. It is imperative that both the CTBT and the Middle East WMD Free Zone figure prominently in the review conference in 2020.

The fourth is the situation on the Korean Peninsula. The Holy See regards favorably and strongly encourages all efforts, from bilateral summits to multilateral initiatives, to achieve the denuclearization of the Peninsula. Ratification of the CTBT by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea would establish a firm commitment on its part not to resume nuclear testing. Returning to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon State and reintroducing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards would be further steps on the way
“to shared and lasting solutions capable of ensuring a future of development and cooperation for the whole Korean people and for the entire region.”

Mr. Chair,

The possession and maintenance of nuclear weapons foster a situation of international distrust based on a deterrent threat of mutually assured destruction, something that could never be the basis of fraternity and solidarity and cooperative security. The Holy See therefore appeals to the Parties to the NPT to continue urgently their efforts to sustain and implement the Treaty, which will contribute in no small way to a true and lasting global peace.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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² Pope Francis Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See for the traditional exchange of New Year Greetings, 7 January 2019.