Open-Ended Working Group to Develop Proposals to Take Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations for the Achievement and Maintenance of a World Without Nuclear Weapons pursuant to UNGA resolution 67/56 of 3 December 2012

First round of substantive meetings
Geneva 14 – 24 May 2013

General Exchange

Statement
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Head of the Delegation of Germany
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Mr. Chairman,

Let me say on behalf of the German delegation that we wish you every success as Chairman of the OEWG. We thank you for the tremendous effort which one needs to put in for taking on the task of chairing such a new undertaking in unchartered waters.

Mr. Chairman,

No-one who has only a faint idea about the work of the fora of the UN disarmament machinery in recent years can dispute that as far as the nuclear field is concerned, things are not as they should be. A large number of states, but also civil society activists, have become deeply dissatisfied with this state of affairs. The OEWG is the direct result of this sense of frustration.

A very large majority, namely 147 states, voted in favour of creating the OEWG.

Germany welcomes the opportunity thus provided to discuss how to make concrete progress towards a world without nuclear weapons with all states, because nuclear weapons concern the entire international community - indeed human kind as a whole.

Mr. Chairman,

In light of the since 1945 well known catastrophic consequences of any use of nuclear weapons every effort must be made that they will never be used again. This is precisely why the objective of bringing about a world without nuclear weapons is so widely supported around the globe.

So there is no need to define the goal as such any more. It is crystal clear - a world without nuclear weapons and for that matter a world without weapons of mass destruction.

So the question which needs to be resolved is how best to achieve this goal.

My delegation welcomes that the OEWG provides a fresh start to tackle this profound challenge.
We welcome that civil society can play a much more active role in this new endeavour.

We hope that new ideas will be generated and that some old baggage, which has not been of much use to get us really forward, will quietly fall by the wayside.

We need to focus on what is essential.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if the OEWG were only to lament the risks and dangers emanating from nuclear weapons, we would squander an opportunity.

We have a concise mandate, namely “to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations” – which means that at the end of the day we should come up with concrete proposals which can bring us closer to our shared goal.

I submit that anyone who takes a sober look at how things stand in the world today will come to the conclusion that a big bang creating a world without nuclear weapons is highly unlikely.

That is why we need “building blocs” helping us to make practical progress.

Some argue that because the “step-by-step approach” has not yielded the nuclear weapons free world yet, one should more or less abandon that approach altogether and go for the real thing so to speak, namely seek an approach which would settle all issues in one go, that is one negotiation and in one single document, with fixed time plans and other such elements.

I understand the sentiment behind this thinking very well, but when you reflect upon its implications I come to the conclusion that it is not really a wise counsel.

Firstly, it is simply not true that the “step-step-approach” has not yielded results. Let us just ask ourselves: Where would the world be today without the steps taken with the NPT, the Test Ban Treaty, the IAEA Safeguards, the AP, the bilateral accords on reductions etc?

And secondly: Where do proponents of the “comprehensive” approach take the confidence from that at this point in time an attempt to negotiate a systematic agreement which would settle all relevant issues of complete nuclear disarmament would actually fare any better than what has been tried by way of “the step-by-step approach”? I would only remind us of the very far-reaching interpretation of Art VI of the NPT, which most of the nuclear weapons states more or less share, which would come into this negotiation as a huge stumbling bloc from day 1!

That is why we remain convinced that we need to continue to develop building blocs which help us to make progress. And let me say as an aside: There is no need for a master plan to understand the relevance of such building blocs in terms of getting to global zero, because their relevance is patently self-evident. I would argue that quite on the contrary any attempt to negotiate a systematic and comprehensive master plan is a safe recipe for endless discussions without any substantive progress at all.

A key building bloc is the long overdue convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes. By creating a non-discriminatory instrument to that end, which would deal with all related matters in a way so that a production ban can be internationally
and effectively verified, disarmament and non-proliferation objectives would be advanced equally. I wonder how anyone can deny the evident usefulness of taking such a step.

To name another building bloc: the establishment of more nuclear weapon free zones would signify practical progress as well. Let me for brevity’s sake only summarily refer to the discussion in the NPT framework about a conference on the establishment of a zone free of WMD in the Middle East.

It remains very important for civil society to continue to mobilize the public at large for such concrete building blocs and not to dismiss them as allegedly outdated in the hope of a big bang solution which is not around the corner. Better a sparrow in your hand than two in the bush.

Mr. Chairman,

The report of this OEWG to the next session of the UNGA is to reflect the OEWG’s work, discussions held, and all proposals made (OP 3).

The more precise and factual the report, the greater its impact on the UNGA when it will assess our efforts made in the OEWG.

Germany continues to hope that the OEWG and the discussion of its outcome in the UNGA will help to generate new impetus for nuclear disarmament, which will be beneficial to other fora as well, not least the Conference on Disarmament, the potential of which unfortunately has not been used for so long.

Thank you.