

High Representative's remarks to the Open-ended working group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations

Geneva, 11 May 2016

Ambassador Thani,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the open-ended working group at this critical phase in your deliberations.

I appreciate the efforts made by Ambassador Thani as your Chairman in trying to steer your deliberations in a frank, open and inclusive direction. My congratulations to all of you for holding such thought-provoking sessions with a number of rich and innovative ideas and proposals.

Despite the wide spectrum of views expressed in this forum we should remind ourselves that we remain united by one profound vision—namely, our common destination of a world free of nuclear weapons. Yes, we appear increasingly divided over how to get there. Yet the key purpose of this Working Group should be to explore ways to overcome those differences so that we can resume this journey together.

In moving forward, we are facing two contending realities.

The first reality is that many States continue to rely on nuclear weapons in their security doctrines. In recent years, this reliance seems to have deepened, not weakened. Meanwhile, we have also had to deal with intractable proliferation crises and the nightmare we all share of present and future risks of nuclear terrorism.

Significant reductions in deployments of nuclear weapons have been made over the last two decades. Yet, more than 15,000 nuclear weapons still exist in the world. Even one is too many. The nuclear-weapon States have a special responsibility to achieve nuclear disarmament. It is incumbent on them to demonstrate continuous progress in conformity with the legal obligation of all States—without exception—to pursue negotiations in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Without sustained progress in nuclear disarmament, we will increasingly confront a second reality. The large majority of non-nuclear-weapon States believe that nuclear weapons are too dangerous to be seen as a legitimate instrument of security. There is a clear and present frustration with the status quo, a growing concern over the lack of concrete results from the established multilateral disarmament machinery, dissatisfaction with the apparent pause in bilateral strategic arms reduction negotiations. Accordingly, pressure is rising for alternative pathways to challenge the perceived status quo.

I have no doubt that everyone in this room shares frustration with the pace of nuclear disarmament. Even those who work in the governments of nuclear-weapon States may share some of these frustrations. This is not just because of the lack of progress in disarmament, but also because of signs going in the opposite direction.

To grapple with these two realities, we must find a way to build bridges. This will require three things. First, we must get out of business as usual. We must take the task at hand seriously and with urgency. Second, we must build on common ground, while respecting differences. Third, we must demonstrate creativity, thinking outside the box, flexibility and sustained commitment by all. Above all, it will require intensifying dialogue, in recognition of the fact that compromises need not involve the sacrifice of agreed objectives, common values, or solemn principles.

It is unfortunate that some important States are not in the room. I therefore appreciate the efforts of Ambassador Thani and many others who have attempted to serve as a bridge between those here and those on the outside, while also seeking to bridge differences inside this room. This is a difficult challenge, but still remains doable.

That is why I am appealing to you to continue your efforts to narrow your differences after this session is over on Friday and before you resume your formal meetings in August. The whole international community is eagerly waiting to see you find a general agreement.

Ultimately, to be successful in realizing our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons, the approach we take, must be inclusive.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I conclude, I wish to remind you that you are all invited to a special event we are organizing together with the Permanent Mission of the Netherlands at 6pm today just outside the entrance of this room. This event will have two purposes. First, it will launch the sale of disarmament publications at the United Nations Office at Geneva bookstore. Second, it will promote the twelve winning entries of the United Nations Poster for Peace Contest. The Secretary-General announced the winner in a ceremony in New York last week. I hope everyone here today will join us.

For this event, we are honoured to have in our presence the United Nations Messenger for Peace, Michael Douglas, whose dedicated and long-standing contributions to our great common cause are well known to us all.

I am also happy to support his personal initiative to promote the unity and effectiveness of the work of non-governmental organizations, in particular their work with the United Nations. I look forward to meeting with him and the NGOs later this afternoon to discuss these issues. As the ties between the United Nations and civil society move forward, *disarmament* goals will also move forward.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Finally, I would like to convey the best wishes of the Secretary-General for the days and months ahead, as you move toward the completion of your work in August. Please be assured of the full support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the United Nations for an inclusive, forward-looking and successful outcome.

I thank you so much.