Statement by

Ms Helena Nolan
Director for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

United Nations General Assembly

70th Session

First Committee

Debate on Nuclear Issues

New York, October 2015

Check against delivery
Mr Chairman

Ireland aligns itself fully with the statement delivered by South Africa on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition. Ireland and its NAC partners want to see real momentum injected into the nuclear disarmament pillar of the NPT. We recognise the yearning for disarmament that exists presently, which is shared by an overwhelming majority of member states. The NAC resolution gives expression to our hope for future meaningful progress towards disarmament objectives and we would ask all member states to consider it favourably.

I would like to add the following comments in a national capacity.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland, Mr Charles Flanagan, addressing the 70th Session of the General Assembly, reaffirmed Ireland’s deep and abiding commitment to the full implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. He also conveyed our deep disappointment at the outcome of the NPT Review Conference in May. The Treaty was founded on a fair and noble bargain of which we are all very well aware. 45 years on, we are still waiting to see the necessary balance across all three pillars of the NPT.

Not a single nuclear weapon has been disarmed under the NPT or as part of any multilateral process and there are no structures or effective measures in place for this to happen. In these circumstances, it is only natural and right to reach for new
approaches than can enhance our understanding, stimulate debate and provoke action. Ireland is pleased to be strongly associated with the debate on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. The humanitarian imperative was, after all, what lay behind the initial adoption of the NPT itself; it is the reason the NPT exists. There has been some discussion in the margins of this Committee on “the proliferation of humanitarian resolutions”. That the issue has come to the fore again now should not surprise anyone; indeed the only mystery is why it has not always remained our guiding principle. After all, when we look behind the meaning of the word, what is humanitarian but that which relates to all humanity – what else should be our greatest driving force than the preservation and protection of life itself?

Indeed, in any area which has become solidified with rhetoric, it is always a good idea to look behind the meaning of words which have become conventional usage. The language in this arena has moved from nuclear weapon, to nuclear deterrent to often just the use of the word deterrent alone. It is worth reminding ourselves that what we are talking about is a bomb, in fact 17,000 of them, whose most distinguishing characteristic is the capacity to indiscriminately obliterate a large section of humanity, while gravely damaging the resources of the planet for those left behind. It is the ultimate instrument of overwhelming proportions, and research by the United Kingdom’s Chatham House has graphically illustrated the risks attaching to nuclear weapons. It should be beyond all comprehension,
knowing what we know now, that such weapons should ever be used again under any circumstances.

Our understanding of the catastrophic humanitarian impact – that is, the impact on peoples – associated with any use of nuclear weapons has developed considerably in recent years. I would like to take this opportunity to again pay tribute to our colleagues in Mexico, Norway and Austria for the conferences they have hosted on this subject and the role of civil society in this broadening and deepening of our understanding in particular the International Committee of the Red Cross. Furthermore, the impossibility of any realistic response capacity at both national and international levels has been shown in stark relief. The world is already grappling with a range of complex humanitarian and socio-economic challenges. No state or multilateral agency is capable of responding to the vast humanitarian crisis which would follow a nuclear detonation. Climate change is seen as one of the biggest global challenges this century but in fact one single nuclear detonation would have a massive impact on the environment for generations to come. Despite all of this, the question is still being asked, is there some agenda behind the humanitarian consequences initiative? As far as we are concerned the answer is quite straightforward, our support for this initiative is solely and exclusively aimed at supporting the fulfilment of the obligations freely entered into by all States Parties under Article VI of the NPT. My delegation would therefore ask member states to consider favourably the
urgent resolution on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons which has been tabled by our EU colleague Austria, and which Ireland is pleased to co-sponsor.

Mr Chairman

In line with our desire to be constructive and to look forward rather than back, my delegation is pleased to co-sponsor the resolution proposed by Mexico on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. Following the successful deliberations of the open-ended working group in 2013, we feel the time is right to convene a second working group, serviced from within existing resources and based in Geneva, to pick up where that group left off, and discuss and negotiate effective legal measures that are necessary to achieve nuclear disarmament. As a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly, it is only right that the group should operate by its rules of procedure and not be bound by consensus. However, we are confident that all parties can work towards a successful outcome. We would welcome the active involvement of civil society to bring fresh thinking and expertise to the discussion. And of course, we need and value the engagement of the nuclear weapons states in every step of the disarmament process, which under the NPT, they are obliged to pursue in good faith, along with all of the rest of us.

Mr Chairman
I do not wish at this time to dwell further on the negatives of the NPT Review Conference earlier this year. However, I would like to say how heartening it was to see so many states parties united in agreeing to a humanitarian pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons. I would like to draw your attention to the resolution tabled by Austria on this pledge – which Ireland is pleased to co-sponsor. I hope delegates will once again demonstrate our shared commitment to this pledge and support it as a Resolution.

Mr Chairman

During our general debate I took careful note of the moving and powerful messages conveyed by representatives of many developing countries, and from the African group. I share their concern of the impact of any potential nuclear detonation on their already fragile circumstances and their dismay at the vast financial resources allocated by some states to the modernisation of their nuclear arsenals at a time when 850 million people still suffer from hunger, 8,000 children die every day due to malnutrition and 800 women still die each day from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth. Is it not worth asking ourselves – if the resources currently devoted to the modernisation and maintenance of nuclear weapons were freed up, what greater good could they be used for in the world?

I warmly commend the South African delegation for tabling a resolution at this session highlighting the ethical imperatives for a nuclear-weapons-free world. This ambitious resolution matches the ambition of the vast majority of states to
look beyond narrow interests and national doctrines, to prioritise instead the advancement of human development globally. My delegation would highlight this resolution’s explicit recognition of the vital role women must play in disarmament negotiations. I would ask member states to consider favorably this important and timely resolution.

Mr Chairman

In a world which is changing ever faster, with an accelerating pace of technological innovation and greater connectivity across the planet than ever before, surely the time has come to recognise that all challenges are now global in nature and that what happens to one affects all. The world is a more volatile and more unpredictable place. Nuclear weapons have not made it any safer: indeed the risks of a nuclear detonation have in our view been shown to be greater than we realised. Fragile states, rogue actors and interstate violence are an increasing source of insecurity. The potential of a nuclear detonation, on purpose or by accident, can only add to the threat to human security and the safety of the planet. If we want the best future for our people, we must work constructively together to secure the peace, safety and security of our world and the best way to do that is to honour our joint obligations and start implementing the NPT as originally intended. Every time we defer that goal, we fail our peoples and continue to put them at risk. Following the disappointment of the 2015 Review Conference, let us therefore redouble our efforts to ensure, not just that others
refrain from developing nuclear weapons, but that such weapons are never used again under any circumstances and that the process begins to put all nuclear weapons beyond use for good.

Thank you.

ENDS