

Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 7 March 2017



Statement by Ambassador Patricia O'Brien

Permanent Representative of Ireland

Mr President,

Let me start by congratulating you on the assumption of the Presidency; I assure you of Ireland's full cooperation and support in your onerous task. I also wish to express my deep condolences for the untimely passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, a memorable diplomat and a personal friend.

It has become a matter of fact to start our statements in this Chamber by addressing the CD's long-standing stalemate, and my statement will unfortunately be no exception. We deeply regret the repeated failures to achieve consensus over a Programme of Work during the past two decades. Flexibility and genuine political will are indispensable for changing this lamentable and unsustainable state of affairs. We welcome the recent establishment of a Working

Group on the Way Ahead under the Chairmanship of Ambassador Lynn of Myanmar as a positive step in our collective efforts to bring the CD back to substantive work. [We also welcome the draft Decision on a Programme of Work which you have just introduced and which we will consider very carefully in the coming days]. Lastly, we stand ready to support any initiative aimed at furthering substantive consultations on membership expansion, as well as any proposal which would amount to a real and substantive review of the CD's membership, which we see as long overdue.

In an era when the global disarmament regime is facing both challenges and opportunities, reiterating our common aspirations or our individual interests is simply not sufficient to achieve progress. This is not a time for re-stating national positions, but for engaging in dialogue and joining efforts to take effective steps towards our common goals.

Mr President,

The achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons has been a driving force of Ireland's foreign policy and of our engagement within the United Nations, and one to which our people and our government remain wholeheartedly committed. The risks inherent in the existence of nuclear weapons are too high to lose more time by only lamenting the complex security

situation. Complex problems require complex solutions – and yet sometimes the most apparently complex decision is also the simplest.

Ireland welcomes the adoption by a large majority of UN General Assembly Resolution 71/258 on the establishment of a United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons, leading to their total elimination, of which Ireland is proud to have been a lead sponsor. We look forward to the negotiations to be held in New York at the end of this month and in June / July, and we encourage all delegations, including Nuclear Weapons States and states possessing nuclear weapons, to participate in good faith. Nuclear disarmament is a common goal, a common interest and a common duty. Abstention from multilateral negotiations does not bring about an absolution from this responsibility.

A prohibition on nuclear weapons is a logical and moral imperative. It is also a legal imperative, stemming from Article VI of the NPT itself. The objective is to fill the legal gap existing under international law with regard to nuclear weapons –the only weapon of mass destruction that is not yet subject to a comprehensive prohibition. At the same time, the new treaty negotiations will contribute to the implementation of Article VI as one of the effective measures provided for in that Article.

It is important to understand that the adoption of a Treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons will not absolve states from their many other obligations and commitments under the NPT, the cornerstone of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Ireland was one of the initiators of the UN General Assembly Resolutions that led to the adoption of the NPT, and our commitment to the Treaty remains unwavering. My delegation looks forward to the upcoming NPT Preparatory Committee, where we will engage actively and constructively, both in our national capacity and as coordinator of the New Agenda Coalition, towards meaningful outcomes on a range of issues including enhanced transparency and accountability and of accelerated implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments. As the failure of the NPT Review Conference in May 2015 to agree an Outcome Document showed, the NPT is not impervious to danger. However, what we all need to understand is that this danger does not come from parallel action, but from inaction. The NPT will not be protected by hampering efforts to advance its object and purpose; the best way to protect the NPT is to implement it.

Further, Ireland would wish to see progress on the long-stalled process leading to a Fissile Material Treaty. In this respect, Ireland voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution 71/259 providing for the establishment of the High-Level Expert Preparatory Group to consider and make recommendations on substantial

elements of a future non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear devices. Notwithstanding our reservations with regard to the limited membership of the new forum, the rule of consensus and the limited scope of the mandate, which excludes stockpiles, we stand ready to support any effort for movement on this front. We attended the informal consultative meeting on this issue in New York this week and will be following developments closely.

In addition to our work on nuclear disarmament, Ireland remains actively engaged in efforts to support the universalization and full implementation of all disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation instruments, including the Arms Trade Treaty, the Anti-Personnel Landmine Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention.

Mr President,

I wish to take advantage of the upcoming International Women's Day to address an issue of high importance to Ireland: that of gender and disarmament. We commend the initiatives of the Netherlands and of Pakistan to hold informal CD plenaries dedicated to this issue in the past. Ireland firmly believes that due consideration ought to be given in disarmament and non-proliferation fora and

negotiations to both the gendered impact of weapons, as well as to women's empowerment and agency. Let me say a few words on each.

Armed conflict and the use of weapons have differing impacts on women and on men. There has been welcome recognition of this in relation to conventional weapons, including in the Arms Trade Treaty and in Security Council Resolutions. When it comes to nuclear weapons, research findings are striking. Ample scientific evidence confirms the disproportionate impact of ionising radiation on women and girls. Ireland has, since the ground-breaking Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, actively engaged in creating awareness of this issue, including in the context of UN First Committee and of the NPT.

Moreover, women have been, and continue to be, a powerful force for change in relation to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control affairs. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 recognises this and calls for women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and for the incorporation of gender perspective in all areas of peace-building. It is our firm belief that empowering women in the disarmament field will bring us closer to our goals, and we look forward to exploring how gender and disarmament can be integrated into our work in the Conference on Disarmament.

Ireland strongly values the contribution of Civil Society to disarmament debates. We see advocacy and interest groups as vital partners in our efforts to make progress on the global disarmament agenda. Further, Civil Society's research and academic work has a major role to play in informing our discussions, in particular on complex questions such as that of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. My delegation strongly supports a more systematic and dynamic engagement of the CD with Civil Society actors.

Mr President,

Ireland condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent launch of four ballistic missiles by the DPRK and aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the European Union in this regard. Once again we urge the DPRK to refrain from actions that flagrantly violate UN Security Council Resolutions and the country's obligations under international law, and threaten the peace and stability of the region. We reiterate our call on the DPRK to re-engage in credible and meaningful dialogue with the international community, in particular within the framework of the Six-Party Talks.

Let me conclude by stating the obvious.

The NPT does not perpetuate the right to nuclear weapons; it acknowledges the reality of their existence while the process of disarmament is taken forward. “Taking forward” are the operative words here, for there has been little perceptible progress on the NPT’s nuclear disarmament pillar. This year marks the beginning of the first multilateral nuclear weapons negotiations since the CTBT over twenty years ago –a treaty which has lamentably not yet entered into force and which we call on all remaining states to ratify without delay. We cannot ignore the wider security situation, nor should we. There has been a worrying decrease in the taboo around threat of use; there are persistent illegal nuclear tests; there is vast investment in so-called modernization, with increased lethal capacity, with talk of more strategic, more targeted, more usable nuclear weapons. But the very idea that any nuclear weapon could ever be used again and in some sort of controlled way is one of the most dangerous to have emerged in the current discourse. Nuclear weapons are the most powerful and most indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction ever invented. Knowing what we know now about their catastrophic consequences and the impossibility of any adequate humanitarian response, we must do everything to ensure that they are never used again. This is the position which informs Ireland’s approach to this issue and our approach to the forthcoming negotiations on the new treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading to their total elimination. As our Foreign Minister said in Hiroshima earlier this week, “To honour and respect those who suffered and died here, we can do nothing more appropriate than to take on the

challenge of their epitaph and ensure that what was done in this place shall never be repeated.”

Thank you, Mr President.