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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

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Item 5 of the agenda

Develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons

Identifying the essential elements for achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons

Submitted by Ireland and Switzerland

Introduction

1. The Open-ended Working Group established by the General Assembly Resolution 67/56 of 3 December 2012 of the United Nations (hereinafter referred to as “the Group”) offers a very useful forum in which States can make proposals as to how the international community might take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. The establishment of an Open-ended Working Group for this purpose demonstrates, in and of itself, the overwhelming support of the international community for greater efforts towards the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons, including complete nuclear disarmament.
2. The Group has already made a very positive start to its work. The interactive debate it has facilitated has demonstrated that, while consensus might not yet be present on some of the issues at hand, productive discussion is possible on these issues. This is already an important contribution.
3. The Group has also demonstrated that discussion can help to clarify possible means by which negotiations might be taken forward, while the expert panels have shown that, in addition to long standing proposals, there exists significant potential to devise new initiatives to take forward the nuclear disarmament agenda, including by focusing on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. This is also a positive development.

4. From discussions within the Group and papers submitted thus far, we sense an emerging view that it is more helpful to frame discussions on how to advance multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations in terms of distinct ‘building blocks’ which could be put in place simultaneously rather than a sequential ‘step-by-step’ approach. A building block approach allows us to identify what actions are needed to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons and then identify how we should pursue them. This is in conformity with the 2010 NPT Action Plan and the thirteen practical steps agreed in 2000, both of which set out a number of actions but do not indicate sequence or conditionality.

5. We also sense an emerging view from contributions and working papers that it is both feasible and desirable to pursue actions in parallel and at the same time. This provides maximum flexibility in taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

6. These are welcome developments from the work of the Group, which provide a useful basis from which to approach our discussions during August. The present working paper is intended as a contribution to identifying areas where we can build on the work achieved so far. We have framed it in the form of four questions which might usefully be considered when we resume our work. These are:

- Question One: What are the actions necessary to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons and what should these actions entail in terms of content?
- Question Two: Once the essential elements are identified, how should they be arranged – a single treaty or a framework arrangement?
- Question Three: How do we approach the question of timeframe, coordination and oversight of negotiations once agreement has been reached to begin multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations?
- Question Four: Having identified what we want to achieve, how do we shape the process and how do we advance work?

7. In common with other contributions to the Group, our paper is based on the assumption that the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons is an objective shared by all States.

Question One

What are the actions necessary to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons and what should these actions entail in terms of content?

8. Many ideas and proposals have been made regarding how to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, as reflected in the Chairman’s working paper of 26 June 2013. There could be value in examining the various building blocks suggested with a view to identifying what actions are necessary to take them forward. For example, actions directed at further stigmatizing nuclear weapons could significantly take forward the case for greater progress on nuclear disarmament.

- To take this forward, the Group might usefully discuss what the non-nuclear-weapon States can do to promote more decisive action by the nuclear-weapon States to diminish the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines with a view to their eventual elimination.
- The Group might consider how best the non-nuclear-weapon States can advance the process of stigmatizing nuclear weapons.

- Which weapons-related activities or principles (use, possession, development, production, transfer, assistance, etc.) would require to be prohibited in order to facilitate nuclear disarmament?

Question Two

Once the essential elements are identified, how should they be arranged – a single treaty or a framework arrangement?

9. The Group might consider how an instrument or arrangement to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons might be framed, or whether a framework of mutually supporting arrangements built around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) might better suit this objective. The options available would seem to be:

- a single treaty approach, e.g. a comprehensive arrangement. For example, both a nuclear weapons convention and a ban treaty have been suggested by some States and/or civil society representatives;
- a number of free-standing instruments or treaties built around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), each dealing with specific aspects of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation;
- a framework convention with protocols, for example as in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), which would cover in a systematic and mutually reinforcing manner multiple aspects of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation;
- a combination of these approaches.

10. The Group might consider the merits of these and other proposals in an attempt to advance a common view on how to arrange these instruments.

11. In addition, the Group might explore if there are other possible actions – whether multilateral, bilateral, unilateral or by groups of States – which might contribute to efforts towards nuclear disarmament. How might new ideas or proposals fit in with established ideas about achieving nuclear disarmament?

Question Three

How do we approach the question of timeframe, coordination and oversight of negotiations once agreement has been reached to begin multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations?

12. When discussing each approach, the Group might consider issues of modality, timeframe and how to coordinate actions. Can progress in implementing agreed actions be capitalised upon to facilitate progress under other actions? (For example, can progress in stigmatizing nuclear weapons be used to promote progress towards the ultimate goal of eliminating these weapons?). How is progress in implementing actions to be monitored? What role can the respective bodies of the United Nations play in monitoring progress? What role can civil society play?

Question Four

Having identified what we want to achieve, how do we shape the process and how do we advance work?

13. Should the Group's report to the General Assembly of the United Nations point to the possibility of establishing a follow-up mandate which could facilitate future work, the direction of which would be agreed in advance?

14. To sum up, it is our hope that agreement will be possible in the Group on elements to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. We recognise, however, that this is a complex subject and that some aspects will require further consideration. It has been suggested that a list of obstacles could be produced as a working paper. We wonder whether, instead, the Group might identify a list of issues on which further discussion could lead to better understanding of perspectives and, ultimately, assist in achieving progress towards negotiations.
