

## **Joint Statement**

### **First Committee of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly**

#### **Clusters One to Four**

**14 October 2021**

Chair,

I take the floor on behalf of Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, ROK, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and my own Country, Italy.

These thematic discussions are an important opportunity for constructive dialogue, especially ahead of the NPT Review Conference. The pandemic continues to disrupt our plans but we are pleased that the First Committee could proceed in-person, even in this abbreviated form, and we hope it can serve as an example for other fora in coming months.

We have an opportunity to give a new impetus to our discussions. Dialogue can help us, but it is not enough. We need to use the time we have wisely to define areas of convergence. The pandemic has reminded us that multilateral dialogue and political will can produce beneficial collective actions, and that the current circumstances are not an impediment to achieving results. In this context, we want to share our perspective on what is required to achieve a successful NPT Review Conference and help advance disarmament.

The NPT remains a singular accomplishment. Since 1970 it has been the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, as well as an essential element of international peace and security.

Its success was not a foregone conclusion, and attention is necessary to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness. Achieving full implementation of the NPT requires active support from States Parties and meaningful and enduring commitments. That is why Review Conferences are important for the Treaty.

We should acknowledge the NPT's achievements and be honest in reviewing its implementation – where we have done well, and where we still have work to do. This also applies to reviewing the NPT review cycles' procedures and working methods. Indeed, an honest assessment of the state of the NPT strikes us as a critical component of a Review Conference's outcome.

Likewise, we need to look to our common interests in strengthening the Treaty, to maintain commitments, to narrow differences and to find space for compromise to advance our shared goals.

Our approach takes into account the international security environment without losing sight of the risks posed by nuclear weapons. Indeed, the NPT has always been an instrument for pursuing ambitious aims whilst taking into account geopolitical realities. That goal has not changed: to advance and achieve a world without nuclear weapons.

To this end, we support pragmatic, inclusive measures including: universalization of the NPT, entry into force of the CTBT, negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament of a treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, cooperation on nuclear disarmament verification, measures aimed at strategic and nuclear risk reduction, a reaffirmation or tightening of existing negative security assurances, greater transparency on nuclear arsenals, and an inclusive dialogue on nuclear doctrines.

Several resolutions presented this year aim to further this agenda including on CTBT, FMCT, verification and joint action and future dialogue. We also recognize the need for disarmament initiatives that recognize the importance of inclusivity and diversity, especially through equal, full and effective participation of women, and engagement of youth.

In addition, we note that there are a number of other disarmament efforts being pursued which could contribute towards a positive NPT Review Conference outcome, including the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) and the Stockholm Initiative. We also recognize the value of ongoing discussion among experts as part of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and the Creating the Environment for Nuclear Disarmament initiative.

We cannot ignore the international security environment, or fail to recognize the constraints it may impose, but inaction is not an answer. We need to move forward collaboratively in ways that reduce risks, build trust, and strengthen verification and compliance, with a view to achieving further reductions in nuclear weapons.

We welcome the extension of the New START Treaty between the US and Russia, which represents a crucial contribution to international security. We also appreciate the efforts of some Nuclear Weapons States to increase their transparency on doctrines and the nuclear weapons they possess. We encourage the P5 to increase their efforts to deliver concrete outcomes at the next Review Conference, and thereby build pathways to further reductions in their nuclear arsenals.

All NPT-States Parties have endorsed a commitment towards a nuclear weapon free world; however, the Nuclear Weapon States have a particular responsibility, as outlined in Article VI. Building much needed trust and confidence in this regard is only possible through sustained engagement, across regions, and including all stakeholders.

Chair,

Let me use this opportunity also to reaffirm our commitment to effective multilateral action against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, which are a growing threat to international peace and security. Securing sensitive materials, especially from access by terrorist networks, and implementing effective export controls continue to be major challenges.

These challenges point to the need for the universal and effective implementation of the CWC and the BTWC. Compliance with, and enforcement of, international obligations are fundamental to the global effort to uphold the international arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. Moreover, impunity must not be tolerated: ensuring accountability is crucial to preserving the integrity of the established norms.

In this vein, we wish to reiterate our support for the UN Secretary General's Mechanism for Investigation of alleged use of chemical and biological weapons. As the only currently available independent international mechanism for investigating alleged uses of biological weapons, the UNSGM is a key component of the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. It should be preserved and strengthened, while avoiding any risk to its independence.

This First Committee provides us with a chance to exchange views on the challenges and opportunities for progress, to make a frank assessment of what we can do collectively to uphold, implement and strengthen international security. We stand ready to cooperate with all UN Member States with this objective in mind.

Thank you.