



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

Conference on Disarmament
***Thematic discussion on cessation of the
nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament***

**Statement delivered by Ambassador Leonardo Bencini,
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament**

Geneva, 16 May 2023

Madam President,

I would like to thank you for organizing today's thematic debate. Italy fully shares the goal of a peaceful and secure world free of nuclear weapons and we restate our strong commitment to preserve and strengthen the disarmament and non-proliferation framework. In this regard, the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), with its three mutually reinforcing pillars, remains the cornerstone of the international regime. It is the only realistic legal framework to pursue a world free of nuclear weapons, in a way that promotes international stability and undiminished security for all. The NPT must be upheld and preserved. We therefore invite States that have not yet done so to join the Treaty as non-nuclear weapon States, without delay and without conditions.

The cessation of the nuclear arms race can only be attained through a progressive approach, based on concrete measures, resulting in an effective, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament. We are striving for true progress on nuclear disarmament because of our utmost concern over the potentially catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

One measure we are pursuing is the prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The lack of progress on the CTBT should be of concern to the entire international community. As a staunch supporter of the Treaty and in line with our current role as Article XIV co-Coordinator, Italy invites all States that have not yet done so, particularly the remaining eight Annex-2 States, to sign and ratify the Treaty without further delay. In the meantime, we call upon all States to continue to respect the voluntary moratorium on nuclear test explosions and to refrain from any action that could undermine the objective and purpose of the Treaty.

Another key priority is for this Conference to immediately start negotiations on a Treaty on fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive

devices, on the basis of document CD/1299 and the mandate contained therein. Such a treaty would be a valuable new element of the international security architecture, which is under growing pressure today. Pending the conclusion of an FMCT, all States should abide by a moratorium on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

I would also like to recall the importance of measures on strategic and nuclear risk reduction, as we had the opportunity to discuss in the course of our plenary meeting on March 23. Such measures should be considered as a pathway to increase confidence within the international security environment and as an important contribution to facilitate progress towards a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with Article VI of the NPT.

Madam President,

Nuclear weapon States bear fundamental responsibilities and we continue to call upon those with the largest arsenals to take concrete steps towards effective nuclear disarmament through further reductions, and to actively engage in strengthening the entire disarmament architecture.

We recall the joint statement of the leaders of the five nuclear-weapon states issued on January 3, 2022 on preventing nuclear war and avoiding arms races, and reaffirm that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. We condemn the Russian Federation's irresponsible use of nuclear rhetoric in the context of its ongoing unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine and call on Russia to recommit - in words and deeds - to the principles enshrined in that statement. The Russian Federation's stated intent to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus is irresponsible and dangerous. Nuclear weapons, for as long as they exist, should only serve defensive purposes, deter aggression and prevent war and coercion. In this context, we urge the Russian Federation to return to the full implementation of the New Start Treaty.

Italy also emphasizes the importance of transparency with regard to nuclear weapons, especially given the challenging nature of the current international security. We welcome efforts already taken by the United States, France and the United Kingdom to promote effective transparency measures through providing data on their nuclear forces and the objective size of their nuclear arsenal and call on others that have not yet done so to follow suit.

Madam President,

let me underscore that the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament also imply the need to tackle nuclear safety and security, together with some proliferation concerns. In this regard, Italy strongly supports the central role of the IAEA. The Agency's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements, together with the Additional Protocols, remain a fundamental insurance for our security and a core component of the NPT.

We express our gravest concern over the serious threat posed by Russia's continued control over Ukraine's Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), and the risks it has created for nuclear safety and security of the facility. We emphasize that such a threat continues to endanger the population of Ukraine, neighbouring states, and the international community. We fully support the IAEA's effort to ensure the safety and security of all Ukrainian nuclear sites and we are about to provide a sizable financial contribution to the Agency to this end.

We urge the DPRK to refrain from any other destabilizing or provocative actions, including any further nuclear tests or launches that use ballistic missile technology, to fully comply with the NPT and IAEA safeguards and to sign and ratify the CTBT.

We remain deeply concerned by Iran's expansion of its nuclear activities. We urge Iran to uphold and fully implement all obligations under its NPT- required safeguards agreement with the IAEA and to return to the full implementation of the JCPoA. In this context, we commend and continue to fully support the IAEA's crucial mandates and efforts in Iran.

I thank you, Madam President.