CNS Summer School on Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Disarmament for Diplomats in Latin America and the Caribbean

Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Check against delivery

New York
6 July 2020
Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am really honoured to address this year’s class of the Summer School on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament for Latin American and the Caribbean diplomats.

The need for education about the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation to the maintenance of international peace and security is as great as it has ever been.

Deteriorating relations between nuclear-armed States have seen a resurgence in the role nuclear weapons play in national security doctrines and strategies. At the same time, the nuclear arms control regime is disintegrating. Together, these factors have raised the risk of nuclear weapon use – either deliberately or by accident, but most likely by miscalculation – to unacceptable levels.

In such a climate we need voices that understand the tangible security benefits disarmament provides, not least to building confidence, increasing transparency and reducing risk.

The elimination of nuclear weapons is the UN’s highest disarmament priority. Why? Because nuclear weapons, along with climate change, represents one of two existential threats to the planet and because any use of a nuclear weapon would be a humanitarian catastrophe.

Through the Secretary-General, the United Nations is a staunch advocate for a world without nuclear weapons. We work with UN Member States to reduce risks, find common ground and get the international community back on the pathway to the total elimination of these inhumane and catastrophic weapons.

For example, the UN supports the President-designate of the forthcoming Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, better known as the NPT, in his efforts to secure a successful outcome that will strengthen the Treaty. The Review Conference represents a significant opportunity to take steps towards a more secure world and the UN is committed to helping States Parties achieve that outcome.

The UN works with Member States to reinforce the historic gains made in disarmament, including the norm against nuclear testing, underpinned by the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-
Ban Treaty. Protecting that norm and ensuring it through the CTBT’s entry into force should be a priority for all States.

Our Member States share these concerns. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) represents the majority of UN States’ desire for urgent progress in the elimination of nuclear weapons. As the Secretary-General has said, when the Treaty enters into force it will become an important part of the international disarmament regime. At the current pace of ratifications, this could be within the next year.

Latin America and the Caribbean have a long and storied history of support for nuclear disarmament, including as the first region to have a nuclear weapon-free zone.

It is a proud tradition that you, the younger generation have inherited.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stressed in his agenda for disarmament, young people are the “ultimate force for change” and have “proved their power time and again in support of the cause of disarmament”. The important and positive contribution that young people can make in sustaining peace was reaffirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2019 by adopting its resolution on “Youth, Disarmament and Non-proliferation”.

This is why in the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs we are stepping up our youth engagement across the spectrum of our activities. We want to increase youth participation and create space for young people to make meaningful substantive contributions to facilitating progress on disarmament. My office is engaging, educating and empowering young people through an outreach initiative, “#Youth4Disarmament” under which various resources, including e-newsletters, training programmes and a dedicated youth website are made available.

We recently selected ten “United Nations Youth Champions for Disarmament” from diverse professional and geographic backgrounds to participate in a programme designed to empower young people to work for disarmament in their communities.

And our flagship training programme – the UN Disarmament Fellowship – continues to bring young diplomats like yourselves together and provide them with access to and understanding of the many forums, organizations and instruments that make up the disarmament regime.
I firmly believe that the continued relevance of multilateralism and international cooperation depends on how we create space for young people to fully participate. At the turning point of UN75, I am convinced that an important element of responsible leadership is to equip young people with knowledge and skills, but also to provide opportunities for them to innovate and develop new ways to reduce threats from weapons.

As diplomats, you will be the generation of global citizens that develops the ethical, moral, security and legal frameworks for the future. I am confident it is a role you will excel in.

I wish you all the best for your programme.

Thank you very much.