Webinar co-organized by UNODA and IAEA


Welcoming Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Virtual Event
27 July 2020
Deputy Director-General Aparo,
Distinguished Panellists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you to this webinar co-organized by the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the International Atomic Energy Agency. This is the fourth such event held and the second we have arranged with our friends and partners at the IAEA.

Although the Tenth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or NPT, has been postponed, these virtual events allow States Parties and other stakeholders to discuss and debate the NPT’s core issues and help maintain momentum during this COVID-19 enforced hiatus.

Today’s topic, safeguards, is integral to the functioning and implementation of the NPT. The safeguards system stewarded by the IAEA, is the backbone of the Treaty, allowing it to fulfil its function as the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime.

The IAEA’s safeguards system is an historic success. For fifty years, it has stood sentinel over peaceful nuclear programmes, ensuring confidence among the international community that such programmes are not being diverted to non-peaceful activities.

That confidence, in turn, facilitates even greater application of the many benefits of nuclear science and technology – developments in which support many of the most vulnerable communities in the world and add significant impetus to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement required by the NPT is a rare instrument that both enables development and reinforces international peace and security.

But proliferation challenges do not remain static and the safeguards system must evolve to meet them. This is what happened in the 1990s after the first Gulf War, when the revelations about Saddam Hussein’s nuclear programme led to agreement on the need for assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities.
Such is the case today, where the double-edged sword of technological advances has created opportunities but also pressing concerns. Developments such as the ability to hide illegal activities in the so-called ‘dark web’ and the rapid advance in additional manufacturing, or “3D printing”, have exposed potential new vulnerabilities in the non-proliferation regime.

At the same time, developments in areas such as remote sensing and distributed ledger technology, provide new opportunities to strengthen the safeguards system to match these challenges. I know this is something the IAEA takes seriously and, as I hope we will hear more on today, is already very active in both combating challenges and developing opportunities.

As the Secretary-General said in his Agenda for Disarmament, the connection between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation – and therefore safeguards – is clear: They are two sides of the same coin. Together, they constitute an interlocking set of reciprocal legal arrangements between the nuclear and non-nuclear States. Backward movement on one side will inevitably lead to backward movement on the other. Progress in disarmament requires the preservation and safeguarding of both existing norms against nuclear weapons and their proliferation.

The NPT is a grand bargain, with mutually reinforcing pillars of disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful uses, all in the service of the Treaty’s ultimate goal – a world free of nuclear weapons. Weakening of any of these pillars undermines the Treaty and the achievement of this goal.

To this end it is important that the international community ensures the sustainability of the safeguards system in the face of growing roles and responsibilities. I am hopeful that the Review Conference can play a key role in achieving this outcome, as I hope it can in strengthening all three pillars of the NPT.

I thank you very much and look forward to the discussions today.