Webinar co-organized by UNODA and BASIC

“The Tenth NPT Review Conference: Youth and the NPT”

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues and friends,
UN Youth Champions for Disarmament and young people in the audience,

It is a great pleasure for me to speak to you today at this webinar on youth and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This event sits at the intersection of one of my Office’s most important priorities – to support the review process of the NPT – and one of our most dynamic new workstreams – youth and disarmament.

In his Disarmament Agenda, “Securing Our Common Future”, the Secretary-General recognized that young people can act as a tremendous force for global change. Indeed, youth movements have often been inclusive of perspectives – including from victims and affected communities, indigenous and underrepresented populations – whose input has not always been present in discussions on nuclear disarmament and the NPT. The Secretary-General committed to further investing in youth education and to establish a platform for youth engagement.

It is incumbent upon my generation, not only to provide young people with education and training opportunities, but also to listen and take into account their perspectives.

This renewed focus on the role of youth in disarmament is also supported by UN Member States. In last year’s resolution 74/64 on “youth, disarmament and non-proliferation”, the General Assembly encouraged the meaningful and inclusive participation of young people in discussions in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation and stressed the importance of education and capacity building.

On Tuesday this week, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2535 (2020) on youth, peace and security, the third such resolution. It encourages Member States to support and integrate youth into decision-making processes and recognizes the unique role youth can play in strengthening the national, local and community-based capacities in conflict and post-conflict situations.

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 have also recently announced a very exciting initiative, our first group of Youth Champions for the United Nations Disarmament Training Programme. I am pleased that many of those Champions are with us at this webinar today. During the course of the programme, they will receive training in general principles of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control through online courses and a two-week in-person study tour in Vienna, Geneva, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They will exchange ideas with disarmament experts from think tanks, civil society organizations and the diplomatic field, and develop a plan to engage their communities on issues related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

The NPT review process is one area that could most certainly benefit from a new perspective that young people can bring. It is no secret that the last NPT Review Conference, in 2015, was not able to agree on an outcome. And while everyone agrees that the next Review Conference – tentatively rescheduled for January 2021 – will be an important occasion, it faces multiple challenges.

In order to overcome these challenges, it is vital that States Parties listen to the world’s younger generations. After all, it is today’s youth that will have to pay the price of the present generation’s failure to rid the world of nuclear risk and to achieve the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. The solution is not to throw our hands up in despair and leave the problem for the next generation to solve, but rather to listen to their ideas and perspectives today. I know that the President-designate, H.E. Ambassador Zlauvinen, is committed to ensuring this outcome and I want to assure him and all States Parties that the Office for Disarmament Affairs is ready and willing to help.

I am looking forward to listening from my fellow panellists, as well as from the many young people in the audience today.

I thank you very much.