Virtual Event by UNODA & SIPRI

“The Tenth NPT Review Conference: Effective Measures for Nuclear Disarmament”

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

Virtual Event
27 August 2020
Mr. Dan Smith, SIPRI Director,

Distinguished panelists,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this event, co-organized with our good friends and colleagues at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute or SIPRI. SIPRI has a long and storied history of thought leadership in the field of nuclear disarmament, and on a couple of other fields, and I am glad to have this opportunity to build on the excellent partnership between our two organizations. It is a pleasure to see colleagues and friends from around the world.

This is the fifth webinar we have held in the lead up to the Tenth Review Conference for the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, better known as the NPT. Although the COVID-19 enforced postponement of the Review Conference was disappointing, the hiatus has provided an opportunity to engage in renewed dialogue. Each virtual event has helped maintain momentum towards the Review Conference and they have been timely reminders to States Parties and all other stakeholders of the myriad benefits provided by this treaty.

As High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I consider today’s topic to be amongst the most urgent and important for not only securing success at the Review Conference but in solidifying the ongoing relevance of the Treaty.

A glance at recent headlines is all that is needed to see how the dangers posed by nuclear weapons are increasing to unacceptable levels. It is not an overstatement to say that due to a combination of factors, the risk of nuclear weapon use is the highest it has been since the darkest days of the Cold War.

Yet there have also been some positive developments. I welcome the ongoing talks between the United States and the Russian Federation and hope that they will lead to the imminent extension of the New START treaty by the maximum five years.

By virtue of its legally-binding commitments on all States Parties – including the five nuclear-weapon States – to pursue nuclear disarmament, and its near universal membership, the NPT is the central vehicle for the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons. The Review Conference remains the best venue to engage in the dialogue needed to reverse these negative trends, enhance positive developments, and, as the Secretary-General has urged, return the world to a common path to nuclear disarmament.
Ensuring such an outcome is in the interest of all States’ security.

It would be naïve to ignore the challenges facing nuclear disarmament at this time, not least the antagonistic relationships between nuclear-armed States and the divisions between nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear weapon States. However, the Review Conference presents an opportunity to constructively engage on these issues and find common ground.

There are multiple effective measures for nuclear disarmament that I believe the Review Conference can make progress on.

First, a high-level reaffirmation of support by States Parties to the Treaty and to the implementation of all commitments undertaken as a Party to it.

Second, they should recommit to the norm against the use of the nuclear weapons and that, seventy-five years after the only use of nuclear weapons in war, it should never be violated.

Third, development of a package of risk reduction measures that can help take the world away from the prospect of nuclear weapon use would be a significant confidence-building measure and lay the ground for more long-term disarmament measures.

Fourth, I hope the Review Conference can serve as a springboard for thinking on how to address emerging nuclear weapons challenges, not least the growing nexus between technological developments and nuclear risks.

I believe that these are realistic and also achievable outcomes.

Failure to secure a successful outcome will not doom the Treaty. It will, however, serve to undermine the value so many UN Member States place on it and, in turn, devalue the review cycle as a way to not only strengthen the implementation of the NPT, but as the de facto multilateral negotiating forum on nuclear disarmament. It could further entrench the divides within the Treaty with long-term ramifications.

Consequently, I continue to encourage all Parties to approach the Review Conference in a spirit of flexibility and with a willingness to engage in real dialogue in order to create an atmosphere conducive to success.

Through constructive, results-oriented engagement we can strengthen this vital instrument, ensure it remains fit for purpose in the twenty-first century and take steps towards a safer and more secure world, a world free of nuclear weapons.

I thank you very much.