



**2020 Arms Control Association Annual Meeting (virtual)**

**“Disarmament Near-Term Priorities, Long-Term Challenges and Opportunities”**

**Closing Keynote Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu  
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**

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1 December 2020  
Virtual Meeting

Distinguished panellists,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset I want to thank Daryl Kimball, Tom Countryman and the Arms Control Association for their enduring expertise and advocacy in the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons, and for their continued friendship with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. These are trying times for those of us seeking to address the dangers posed by nuclear weapons, and they require all of us to support one another in staying focused on the task at hand.

I also want to congratulate you for, as always, assembling some of the most well-respected minds and critical thinkers in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. I was listening in to the presentations and engagement with audience members have truly run the complex gamut of challenges and opportunities facing us at this singular geostrategic moment.

As has been made clear, a confluence of factors that include corrosive relations between nuclear-armed States in an increasingly multipolar nuclear order, technological advances with strategic implications, regional security crises with nuclear overtones, and the advent of a costly so-called ‘qualitative arms race’, have increased nuclear risks to unacceptable levels. At the same time, the nuclear disarmament machinery is paralyzed, and the arms control regime hangs by a thread.

The interlocking and cross-cutting nature of these trends, and their potentially catastrophic ramifications have placed us at a juncture, at which the only choice for the international community is to reverse its current trajectory or face a growing potential for catastrophe. And, let me reiterate what I have said so many times before: arms control and disarmament are not utopian ideals. History shows that they are useful, effective and indeed indispensable instruments for security.

As I said, I was quietly listening in to the presentations by my dear colleagues Rose Gottemoeller and Tom Countryman and they have reinforced to me some vital near-term priorities that can stop the current normative erosion in nuclear disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. They have also highlighted many of the longer-term challenges and opportunities for how the international community can build upon the great gains made to

date while seeking to encompass the emerging realities of the international peace and security environment.

For the former, as I see it, stemming the blood flow and returning to the path toward a world free of nuclear weapons requires at least the following near-term actions.

First, the “New START” treaty should be extended for the full five years allowed for in its articles. The ramifications of unconstrained strategic nuclear competition extend beyond the two parties involved; they affect all States, and a five-year extension will buy time to negotiate further reductions while maintaining a verifiable cap on the most dangerous weapons in existence. The same period should also be used to reflect and explore new approaches to arms control and disarmament, and I will come back to this issue.

Second, there is a clear need for urgent measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war. These could include adapting Cold War confidence-building mechanisms to the current context, or developing measures to address new challenges, such as declarations not to deploy particularly destabilising weapons. Risk reduction and confidence-building could also extend to enhanced support for efforts to verify nuclear disarmament or to reduce the dangers of miscalculation posed by new technologies through, for example, politically binding agreements not to target command and control structures.

Third, non-proliferation challenges must be resolved through political engagement and diplomatic negotiations. Regional crises, the deteriorating international security climate, technological developments and military build-ups are all exacerbating proliferation drivers. Yet history has taught us that these cannot be resolved through sabre-rattling or simple shows of force. Instead, they require dialogue and resolve as an integral part of efforts to tackle the root causes and to establish dialogue processes or frameworks and risk reduction and confidence-building measures at the regional level.

Fourth, the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime should be reinforced and refurbished. The nuclear disarmament machinery has lain fallow for too long. It needs to get back to work. States possessing nuclear weapons should reaffirm their moratoria on nuclear testing and work with all States to bring the Comprehensive-Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) into force. Divisions, including over the implementation of outstanding commitments, threaten to weaken the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – the centrepiece of the global regime. As the President-designate has said, States

Parties should seek to use the time provided by the postponement of the Tenth Review Conference to narrow divergences and find the common ground that will strengthen implementation of all three of the NPT's pillars and, in turn, shore up the regime as a whole.

Fifth, and following, it should be recognized that the global regime is made up of numerous agreements and instruments all seeking the same ultimate goal. Secretary-General Guterres has stated that the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons will be another pillar in that regime. There are many, often very strong, opinions on the TPNW, but its imminent entry into force means it is a fact, and the intensions of those who have joined it sincerely to reinforce the nuclear disarmament regime should not be questioned. What is needed in my view is a *modus vivendi* between supporters and opponents of the TPNW that will ensure divisions do not impede progress across the broader regime. And I believe it is entirely possible.

I believe that addressing these five issues will help to blunt the nuclear dangers we currently face but ensuring the continued viability of efforts to address the risks posed by nuclear weapons and bringing about their eventual elimination requires longer-term thinking and solutions.

Today's world is vastly different to that of even a decade ago when New START was negotiated. Navigating its increasingly choppy waters to reach safe harbour requires, in my view, some serious new thinking. This could include the following.

First, let me start with the approach of such thinking process, as I believe it is important. Changing times require a more inclusive and diverse approach that takes into account the views of all stakeholders. This includes the full and equal participation of women in disarmament processes. Such an approach is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do – peace processes that include women are demonstrably more successful. It also means providing a platform for today's youth – as Secretary-General Guterres would say, “tomorrow's peacebuilders”. They will inherit the current generation's successes and mistakes, and their views should be taken into account. I would even say that, given the increasingly apparent impacts of new and emerging technologies, contributions of young people with fluency in these matters will be absolutely critical. It requires protecting the valuable role played by civil society organizations like ACA, but also creating new partnerships with interested stakeholders such as industry.

Second, we need a fundamental shift in thinking when it comes to military spending, including the exorbitant amounts being spent on nuclear weapons. COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated that security cannot be provided by weapons alone. Humans should be placed front and centre, and security should be anchored in approaches that prioritize prevention and mediation. International, national and human security are not mutually exclusive. In a time of diminishing resources, I hope we can all agree that a global military budget of 1.9 trillion dollars can be better spent in support of pressing goals such as defeating the pandemic.

Third, the confluence of factors mentioned above requires what Secretary-General Guterres has referred to as a ‘new vision’ for disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation – one that takes into account the shifting dynamics of the current era. Many quality ideas have already emerged from States, think tanks and civil society. That was very clear during today’s presentations. It is important to engage all stakeholders in dialogue that can collect, distil and build on them. Questions that have emerged that some of us have started to reflect upon include the following: how can we reduce the dangers posed by the nexus between nuclear weapons and new technologies and domains of conflict? How can we progressively include other nuclear-armed States in arms control processes, and how can we include all classes of nuclear weapons in such processes? How can we start conversations to address the long overdue issue of missile proliferation? How can we ensure that the safeguards system and verification measures are fit for purpose in a world of rapid technological change? What might be regionally tailored approaches, backed by strengthened global norms, look like?

All of these suggestions and issues related to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation need to be considered in the broader international security context. But then, I have been saying for some time that disarmament also needs to be better integrated into broader peace and security endeavours. It is an integral element of efforts to prevent, mitigate and end armed conflict. Disarmament and other peace building and security initiatives are also complementary and can be pursued in parallel.

The Tenth NPT Review Conference is an obvious place to gain traction for the implementation of these near-term and longer-term priorities. Due to the NPT’s obligations and its near-universal membership, the NPT remains the de facto negotiating forum for nuclear weapons issues and – at the risk of mixing my metaphors – it could help both hold the line against nuclear risks while setting the table for long-term solutions.

But these issues also need to be considered universally and by all relevant parties. With its unique convening power and clear mandate, the United Nations is well-placed to act as a platform for multistakeholder dialogues on the future of efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. We – the United Nations – are an international instrument established by member states, and we strive to be an effective instrument in support of their responsibilities to pursue peace and security.

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it should be that seemingly low probability events can occur with catastrophic global consequences. The international community has a responsibility to ensure that this does not become the case with nuclear weapons. The norm against the use of nuclear weapons has been maintained for seventy-five years. To ensure it continues in perpetuity, we must take this opportunity to reverse the current nuclear trajectory and chart the course to a safer and more secure world – a world without nuclear weapons.

I thank you very much for your attention and look forward to our exchanges.