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Open-ended Working Group to develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons

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Item 5 of the agenda

Develop proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations for the achievement and maintenance of a world without nuclear weapons

Summary¹

Discussion by the moderator of Panel VI² on “Exploring new approaches to nuclear disarmament”

Document submitted by the Chairperson

1. The discussions were intense and fruitful, thanks in particular to three members of the panel, Ms. Patricia Lewis, Mr. John Borie and Mr. Neil Buhne. It is difficult to do them justice, given the wealth of ideas that were exchanged.
2. The main aim was to take an in-depth look at various approaches that have seen significant developments in recent years and to try to better define their impact and potential in relation to nuclear disarmament.
3. The question of **delegitimizing nuclear weapons** is a relatively recent approach, but it is an essential first step. It was pointed out that the possession of nuclear weapons is based on a number of concepts that need to be deconstructed and challenged. Several lines of argument that are used to legitimize nuclear weapons were mentioned, in particular those related to the fact that nuclear weapons have for a long time been part of the international security system and have helped to prevent conflict, especially during the cold war. The symbolic link between the possession of nuclear weapons and political influence on the international scene is also said to have played a key role. This is why some States wish to acquire a nuclear weapon.

¹ The summary is submitted in a personal capacity, and has no official status.

² Mr. Urs Schmid, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Conference on Disarmament.

4. It is important to question the various traditional arguments since, as things stand, there is no historical proof that nuclear dissuasion prevents conflict. Moreover, nuclear weapons are unusable militarily because of their indiscriminate effects. The costs entailed in maintaining nuclear arsenals, in addition to the opportunity costs, are also an important argument. Lastly, a State can be influential on the international scene without possessing a nuclear weapon.

5. The discussions addressed the importance of efforts to challenge the legitimacy of nuclear weapons and the need to look more closely at the issue of delegitimization in order to better identify how it could contribute to nuclear disarmament.

6. Another key point in the discussion was the **humanitarian dimension of nuclear disarmament**. This dimension is an important development for the following reasons:

- It helps delegitimize nuclear weapons;
- It paves the way for either a new discourse on nuclear disarmament or an alternative to the dominant, mainly security-related, discourse. In this respect, it is important to reconceptualize the debate on nuclear disarmament;
- It helps change the existing dynamics and is fundamental to efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons.

7. The use of a nuclear bomb would have devastating effects. Apart from the direct victims, it would pose insurmountable obstacles in terms of providing aid for victims and would have a significant psychological impact. It would also have a profound and direct impact on the economy, the environment, agricultural production and health, in both the short and long term.

8. The power of the humanitarian dimension lies largely in the fact that it draws on an approach based on facts and factual evidence. Extrapolations can be made from the incidents in Chernobyl or Fukushima, or from nuclear tests. Developments in modelling techniques also offer new possibilities in this area. Efforts to collate such factual evidence should be pursued.

9. The question of whether experience with the banning of anti-personnel mines or cluster weapons can be generalized to nuclear disarmament efforts was also raised in the discussion. The panel stressed that even though these weapons were very different in nature, some aspects of the processes that led to the bans on anti-personnel mines or cluster weapons were pertinent to nuclear disarmament efforts. Several lessons can be drawn from these processes. These processes took place outside negotiating forums because the latter were manifestly unable to offer a solution to the problem. The legitimacy of anti-personnel mines and cluster weapons was challenged using factual scientific data. The consequences in terms of development were placed at the heart of the debate. Lastly, these processes benefited from the active participation of a number of networks and relied on an appeal for urgent action with clear goals and a clear humanitarian purpose.

10. The discussions offered an opportunity to highlight a number of questions about future stages in the process and the need to spell them out. This is particularly pertinent in terms of knowing when States should stop merely discussing the humanitarian dimension and start taking practical measures. It is necessary to determine whether the traditional disarmament forums are a suitable platform for moving forward on nuclear disarmament and whether, when and how to include possessor States in such a process. It will also be necessary to determine whether disarmament should be addressed only from a global perspective or whether the process should also have a regional component.

11. The discussions also addressed the question of what the next logical step would be and how to decide whether an issue is ready to be taken to the next stage. While no firm

answer to these questions emerged from the debate, it was stressed that no issue can be said to be ready yet, but action should be taken to get one ready for the next stage. Developments in the area of delegitimization or the humanitarian dimension are capable of changing the overall context and facilitating progress in areas of disarmament that have long been gridlocked.

12. In conclusion, according to the moderator, there was a wealth of discussion among panel members. However, while many aspects of the issue were addressed, the debate is far from over, thanks, in particular, to the complexity and scope of the subjects dealt with. It is therefore not possible to draw definitive conclusions on the issues dealt with on this occasion. However, if the discussions demonstrated one thing, it was the potential of new approaches to nuclear disarmament and the need to examine them in greater depth.
