
Conference on Disarmament

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English

Final record of the one thousand one hundred and seventy-third plenary meeting

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President: Mr. Mikhail Khvostov..... (Belarus)

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The President (*spoke in Russian*): I declare open the 1173rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

On behalf of the Conference, I have the honour to welcome Mr. Micheál Martin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland. Sir, you have the floor.

Mr. Martin (Ireland): Mr. President, I am honoured to speak here today before such a distinguished audience in this historic chamber. This is my first address to the Conference on Disarmament since I took office as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland in 2008. In that period, disarmament and non-proliferation have been issues of high priority for Ireland, as indeed they have been for every Irish Government for over 50 years.

One of my proudest moments as Minister for Foreign Affairs was the Dublin Diplomatic Conference, which adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions in May 2008. Many of you are associated with that success. It was the result of 15 months of intensive partnership of Governments, international organizations and civil society towards a common humanitarian goal. The Convention has now been ratified by 30 States and signed by 104, and will enter into force on 1 August. The first meeting of States parties will take place later this year in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This will open a new phase of work where the focus must be on implementation of the Convention and working towards its universal adoption. I am pleased that the Convention has had a strong effect internationally on stigmatizing these terrible and indiscriminate weapons even before formally becoming international law.

This week marks the anniversary of another proud moment in Irish and international history, with the fortieth anniversary next Friday, 5 March, of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In 1958, one of my distinguished predecessors, Frank Aiken, introduced the first of a series of United Nations resolutions, which called for prevention of the further dissemination of nuclear weapons. He worked tirelessly for a treaty on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The lasting achievement of the NPT has been to diminish the spectre of a nuclear war. The nuclear-weapon States made binding commitments to nuclear disarmament and other States undertook not to acquire nuclear weapons. This commitment to nuclear disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States was transformed into practical steps at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, at which the seven-member New Agenda Coalition, including Ireland, played a central role.

Unfortunately, significant unfinished business remains. The threat from nuclear weapons is still very real and promises remain unfulfilled. The potential for the destruction of our planet creates the imperative for a nuclear-weapon-free world. The international community has to strengthen efforts to prevent the further proliferation of nuclear weapons. It has to stop the risk of these weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation must be mutually reinforcing.

We have seen high and low points on the road to NPT implementation. With the dissipation of Cold War tensions, the 1995 Review and Extension Conference agreed the indefinite extension of the Treaty. The Middle East resolution, which calls for a nuclear-weapon-free zone to be established, was achieved. Five years later, the 13 practical steps towards nuclear disarmament were adopted. Regrettably, these successes have been followed by a decade of stagnation. Progress has not been made on the Middle East resolution, and many of the practical steps have not been implemented. The status of outcome documents has also been called into question.

Fresh United States leadership is a cause for optimism at this time. So too are signals from the nuclear-weapon States that they are willing to make progress on disarmament. This will be essential if we are to achieve movement across the spectrum at the Review Conference in May. President Obama's Prague speech last April and the United States'

approach since then are very welcome. The Security Council summit to discuss nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament last September and the nuclear security summit in Washington next month are encouraging developments. I am heartened by the statements and approaches of other nuclear-weapon States, particularly the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom. A satisfactory conclusion to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) follow-on negotiations would translate rhetoric into reality. It would undoubtedly establish a solid foundation for good faith negotiations in May on practical, concrete, transparent and verifiable steps. These should reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in existence and offer satisfactory security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States.

I welcome the United Nations Secretary-General's five-point proposal of October 2008. It adds significant weight to the familiar plea that the nuclear-weapon States should fulfil their disarmament obligations and introduce more accountability and transparency. Ireland will not only echo these calls in May but work for genuine progress on them.

With the 2010 Review Conference fast approaching, we are frequently asked to define success. The 2005 Conference effectively broke down because there was a lack of political will from a few key States. A starting point this year must therefore be a clear restatement of purpose. There has to be a thorough review of the Treaty's implementation. A balanced, consensual and forward-looking package of decisions should be agreed with concrete steps for the way ahead. States should reaffirm their acceptance of important decisions taken at previous review conferences, agree measurable progress to implement each of the three pillars of the NPT, and identify concrete steps towards the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The 2010 outcome should make it crystal clear that we are on an irreversible path to achieve the aims set out so clearly over 40 years ago.

New challenges must be confronted as well as the unfinished business I have set out. The NPT was designed in a different era and many of the situations facing it have evolved over time. We face very serious and different proliferation risks, particularly from Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. These must be tackled seriously and the issue of withdrawal from the treaty must also be addressed.

Circumstances appear more propitious for the NPT than for a decade. However, success in May needs robust leadership and all of us must play our part. We need to see rhetoric translated into practical steps. Bridges must be built and differences resolved. I assure you that Ireland will play its part in May. We will work with our partners in the European Union, the New Agenda Coalition and the Vienna Group of Ten and with all other States parties to strengthen the NPT regime. We are committed to achieving an outcome acceptable to all.

There is a fundamental link between the objectives of the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the last major agreement negotiated in this forum. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a critical step on the road to nuclear disarmament. I am concerned that almost 14 years after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, the Treaty has yet to enter into force. I am heartened by recent political momentum on the Treaty and again encourage the nine remaining Annex II States to immediately and unconditionally ratify the Treaty.

The Conference on Disarmament has made an outstanding contribution in the area of arms control and disarmament. Therefore I am deeply disappointed that the Conference has not managed to engage in the substantive work of negotiation for almost 15 years. Ireland has not seen any meaningful work since we became a member in 1999. There is more than enough work to be done and I appeal to you to agree on a programme of work without delay.

The negotiation of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices is long overdue. Negotiations on such a treaty should begin in this body at the earliest opportunity. To be meaningful, such a treaty should include a verification mechanism and cover existing stocks. A fissile material cut-off treaty would limit the expansion of existing nuclear arsenals, and serve as a key element in a phased programme for their total elimination. I hope that a resolution to the current impasse can be found, and that the Conference can proceed with the work that it is here to do.

My visit here today is an opportunity to think about the centrality and relevance of the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law, and the importance of their full implementation. Humanitarian concerns are at the heart of Irish foreign policy and fundamental to our interconnected approaches to security, disarmament, development and human rights. Our policy approaches have been informed by the experience of our peacekeepers and development workers overseas. This also influenced our approach to weapon systems that cause indiscriminate harm and our role in the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in the 1990s and the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008.

Ireland takes a leading role in this work and I look forward to the first meeting of States parties to the Convention on Cluster Munitions later this year. We are supporting the Lao People's Democratic Republic in its preparations, and I have already provided an Irish member of staff to support this work in Vientiane. We will make a substantial contribution to the Lao People's Democratic Republic Cluster Munitions Trust Fund when it is established shortly. Ireland also remains committed to a successful outcome to the ongoing negotiations here in Geneva of the Group of Governmental Experts within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

I witnessed at first-hand the impact of cluster munitions at the Dublin Diplomatic Conference when I had the privilege of meeting survivors. I am proud that the Convention on Cluster Munitions contains groundbreaking provisions for victim assistance and clearance of contaminated areas. This will significantly influence our future approach at the policy and practical levels.

There are challenging and evolving trends in the field of conventional disarmament. Ireland is devoting attention to the overarching concept of armed violence and its impact on human security, sustainable development and implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. I hope that there will be a successful outcome to the fourth biennial meeting of States on small arms and light weapons in New York in June. I look forward to the presentation of a set of internationally accepted and validated standards on such arms and weapons, the development of which Ireland has been pleased to support. We are also firmly committed to the development of a binding and comprehensive global treaty on the trade of arms, covering all weapons and ammunition. We will work hard for a robust and effective arms trade treaty.

The Irish Government attaches a high priority to practical initiatives on the ground. Over the past five years, we have spent over €27 million to make genuine differences to people's daily lives through armed violence prevention and reduction strategies. This will continue to be a priority.

The role played by civil society across the spectrum of disarmament and non-proliferation is critical and welcome. Only States can conclude binding international treaties. However, the political reality is that such treaties are not negotiated in a vacuum. The hopes and fears of our citizens, including those directly affected by armed violence, must be heard.

The challenges we face today on disarmament and non-proliferation are daunting. We cannot afford the luxury of despair or lack the will to go on. There are glimmers of hope and opportunities to make progress here at the Conference on Disarmament and at the

NPT Review Conference two months from now. We cannot change the past, but working together with sufficient resolve and determination, we can change the present – and shape the future.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland for taking part in our work and for his comprehensive statement, which demonstrates the Irish Government's support for the work of the Conference.

I shall now suspend the meeting to escort the Minister from the conference room.

The meeting was suspended at 3.25 p.m. and resumed at 3.30 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): We shall now continue with our meeting. Would any delegations like to take the floor? I see that the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran wishes to speak. You have the floor.

Mr. Hosseini (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, allow me at the beginning to congratulate you on your assumption of the post of President of the Conference on Disarmament. I assure you of the full cooperation and support of my delegation.

The reason that I am taking the floor is to reply to the comment made by the distinguished Foreign Minister of Ireland regarding the peaceful nuclear activities of my country. I would like to reiterate that the peaceful nuclear activities of Iran are in accordance with the rights of my country under the NPT. The assessment made by the distinguished Foreign Minister of Ireland regarding this particular issue regrettably is not in accordance with reality.

Since the issue is not related to the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, I limit my comment to this point. Although we welcome the presence of dignitaries in the work of the Conference on Disarmament to share their views with the members of the Conference, I request the distinguished members of the Conference to avoid politicizing the work of the Conference by raising issues which are not in the mandate of the Conference on Disarmament.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his contribution and now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. You have the floor.

Mr. Jon Yong Ryong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Mr. President, it is with regret that my delegation rejects the references of some delegations, including the Foreign Minister of Ireland this afternoon, who singled out the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which withdrew from the NPT in order to defend its supreme interests. By making those remarks in his statement, he created the misleading impression that our country alone was violating the treaties related to disarmament. And he has jumped to the conclusion that the impasse and complications in the situation on the Korean peninsula are attributable to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

This cannot be construed as other than intentionally ignoring the essence of the matter, which is directly related to the existence of one country, protecting someone's power politics and turning to unfairness.

As we have clarified clearly on several occasions, my country's withdrawal from the NPT is a legitimate self-defence measure inevitably undertaken to protect the supreme interests and security of the country from the increasing nuclear threat of the United States.

There would have been no strong countermeasure like my country's withdrawal from the NPT if the United States had not listed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as an "axis of evil" and as the target of its pre-emptive nuclear strike.

To speak clearly again on the Korean peninsula, the NPT was unable to foil nuclear-weapon deployment by a State which possesses the largest nuclear arsenals or stop its nuclear threat. The NPT has stipulated that the nuclear-weapon States are obliged to dismantle nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, the offender, who introduced nuclear weapons into the Korean peninsula, while resorting to nuclear blackmail, is now attempting to label the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as an unlawful State by abusing international law. Unfortunately, this is today's reality in international relations.

If anyone truly wants the peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula, it should take an impartial stance and urge the United States to take part in dialogue for settling the nuclear issue.

My delegation wishes to highlight that the Irish delegation should take full responsibility for having described our country as the sole violator of the international treaties related to disarmament and for turning the multilateral disarmament negotiating forum into an arena for a showdown with us in its statement this afternoon.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank the distinguished representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for his contribution and would like to know whether there are any other delegations wishing to take the floor. I do not see any and so will make the following announcement.

Our next formal plenary meeting will take place tomorrow, 3 March, at 3 p.m. in this room. His Excellency Mr. Bogdan Aurescu, State Secretary of Romania, will address the Conference.

With that, today's meeting stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.