



PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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**The United Nations conference to negotiate a legally-binding instrument
to prohibit nuclear weapons
General Statement by H.E. Christian Wenaweser, Head of Delegation
New York, 27 March 2017**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madam President,

Let me first congratulate you and the other members of the bureau on your election. In preparing for this conference we could already witness your diplomatic skills and we look forward to your able guidance throughout this process. I assure you of my delegation's active and constructive participation to achieve the aim of this conference: to adopt a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty (NWBT).

Historic nature of the conference

This conference is truly of historic nature. The broad and high-level representation today shows strong political support for this process. Our conference is the result of persistent effort by many States over a long period of time, working together with civil society, to achieve a goal people have dreamed of for decades: to free the world of nuclear weapons. Today, it is widely accepted that real security will never come about as long as there is a risk that nuclear weapons may unfold their indiscriminate deadly potential. States must take effective measures to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and engage in nuclear disarmament with a view to eliminating nuclear weapons, in accordance with their obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In milestone agreements we have managed to outlaw biological and chemical weapons and many other types of weapons that inflict disproportionate suffering or are inherently indiscriminate. We gather here today to walk the last mile and finally also outlaw nuclear weapons once and for all.

Historical context

The destructive potential of nuclear weapons have been evident since the founding of the United Nations. The very first General Assembly resolution in 1946 dealt with this issue, even though the full extent of the damage and inter-generational effects of the atomic blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had not been fully understood at that time. In 1955 the world's most renowned nuclear physicists observed in the so-called "Russel-Einstein Manifesto" that nuclear weapons threaten the continued existence of mankind and that a war with these weapons risks

putting an end to the human race as such. The First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament stressed in 1978 that “nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization.” Nowadays, in an unstable geopolitical environment and with longstanding international norms and agreements put into question, this danger is even higher. In addition, the possibility of nuclear weapons and nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists poses yet another risk difficult to contain.

The destructive potential of nuclear weapons was most painfully and most tragically experienced by the victims and survivors (*hibakusha*) of the bombings in Japan who lost loved ones, saw their communities destroyed and continue to suffer from living in a contaminated environment. That potential was also obvious to the residents of Pacific islands where nuclear tests caused displacement, environmental contamination and a wide range of health problems for the local population. The leaders of our nations, including those with nuclear stockpiles, have overwhelmingly committed to working on nuclear disarmament in the past. But action has been slow, windows of opportunities have passed and we find ourselves today in new and dangerous arms race fueled by confrontational politics and inflammatory rhetoric.

This conference is a sign that the vast majority of States strongly disagrees with the complete lack of progress in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It is also a strong sign that we are ready to overcome this state of play by the means at the disposal of the United Nations – international norms and the rule of law. This will involve hard, unglamorous and tedious negotiations in the coming weeks and months, but the result will hopefully represent the beginning of a new era on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

Imperative for ban now

As long as nuclear weapons exist, there is a substantial risk that they will be used – by design or accident. Research has greatly advanced our understanding about the tremendous humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use, including their deep impact on human life, our environment, socio-economic development and the health of future generations. We welcome the fact-based discussions that took place during the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, convened respectively by Norway in March 2013, Mexico in February 2014 and Austria in December 2014. These conferences helped understand that no State or international body alone could address the humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation, let alone provide adequate assistance to victims, in particular to women and children who are disproportionately affected.

With the Humanitarian Pledge endorsed by 127 States, including Liechtenstein, two thirds of the international community consider any use of nuclear weapons a serious violation of international humanitarian law and of our basic human values. More than twenty years ago, in 1996, the International Court of Justice found that “the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law.” The Court argued that given the unique characteristics of nuclear weapons their use in fact seems scarcely reconcilable with respect for

requirements for the conduct of armed hostilities. Indeed, it is difficult to envisage how the use of nuclear weapons would not constitute a war crime and would thus not entail individual criminal responsibility.

The International Court of Justice was most affirmative in its unanimous conclusion that “there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control”. Today, we have a genuine opportunity to make good on this obligation by establishing a clear and comprehensive legal ban on nuclear weapons and to advance the project of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Goals to accomplish at the conference

While the size of nuclear arsenals has decreased over time, current stockpiles would still be enough to annihilate all life on our planet multiple times. A legally binding treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons is an important first step towards the ultimate goal of complete elimination of nuclear weapons – the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons will never be used again.

Most nuclear weapon States are already bound by a commitment to nuclear disarmament, in particular article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Efforts in this respect, however, have been characterized by inertia and at times complacency by those bearing the greatest responsibility. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation effort have long been faced by stubborn political stalemate and refusal to engage by a few to the detriment of many. The need for a new approach has emerged as an expression of deep dissatisfaction of a large majority of States with the current state of play.

The new treaty must build on the existing legal instruments and norms. Liechtenstein continues to be fully committed to and deeply convinced of the value of the NPT regime and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). It is utterly incomprehensible that both have not achieved universality or even, in the case of the CTBT, entered into force.

Liechtenstein engages in this exercise in the sincere hope that it will contribute to the aim of a universal and comprehensive nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, of which the comprehensive prohibition of nuclear weapons is a central element, as are the NPT, the CTBT and the important regional, multilateral and bilateral agreements in this area.

Many States have joined together into Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ) in a best practice that we once hoped would proliferate by itself, given the security gains such zones have brought for their members. Unfortunately, nuclear weapons continue to play a central role in national defense and security policies. For a large majority of States, however, the existence of high-alert nuclear arsenals is an existential risk rather than a security gain. With this conference States have the opportunity to express themselves on the need to prohibit nuclear weapons with a view to their total elimination. After decades of stalemate in nuclear disarmament a new legally binding instrument can only make a positive contribution to these discussions.

Challenges

In our negotiations we must be ambitious and pragmatic at the same time. We must be clear and comprehensive on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. But an international legally binding instrument to that effect will enhance our security only if it ultimately aspires to universality. It is therefore important that the norms and rules we agree on can eventually become acceptable to all States, including current Nuclear Weapons States (NWS), those affiliated through security arrangements or treaties and those otherwise skeptical. To the States who are not engaging with us today – many of them among our European neighbors and friends – we commit to develop an instrument that will represent an open door for a time in which policies and postures will have changed, in a hopefully not-too-distant future.

While we encourage all States to join the negotiating table, we are also mindful that throughout history those who are comfortable with the status quo rarely advocate for change. Yet, change has often come about unexpectedly. Judging by the vigorous advocacy by civil society across the world we are hopeful and confident that the movement towards the universal prohibition of nuclear weapons will persist and succeed.

National action

Liechtenstein already has legislation in place reflecting the objectives of this conference and has prohibited nuclear weapons, as well as all their financing, brokerage, development, production, acquisition, transfer, import, export, transit, storage or possession. We are ready to engage with States on national implementation as part of the broader implementation efforts in the framework of the new legally binding instrument.

Conclusion

Finally, as we start our negotiations the hopes of many who want to see a better, safer and more secure future are relying on us. We owe it to them to engage in good faith and to contribute as best we can to laying the ground for a genuine political consensus around the prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Thank you.