



Belgium

General Statement

Preparatory Committee for the 2020 NPT Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

Third session, New York, 29 April-10 May 2019

Mr. Chairman,

Let me first congratulate you on assuming the chairmanship of this Preparatory Committee meeting and assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation in performing your responsibilities.

Belgium aligns itself fully with the statement made by the European Union, as well as the statement that I have read out on behalf of the group of broadly like-minded countries.

Mr. Chairman,

The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has been successful in containing the nuclear threat and distributing the benefits of the atom. Its success is however not immune to global turbulence and pressure. This is especially true today as we witness the strains on the international rules based order of which the NPT forms an important pillar. Our international rules based order was created to mitigate the effects of conflicting policies of self-interest. Let us not live under the illusion that when priority is given to sovereign rights and benefits over shared interests and international rules, the end result will be any less detrimental than in the past. The NPT provides strategic stability by preventing the dissemination of the most destructive weapon of our time and by endorsing the vision of a world without nuclear weapons. This has been a joint endeavour from the outset and it entails shared rights and responsibilities.

In order to uphold the NPT, we need to strengthen its implementation and assist the actors who are instrumental in this regard, such as the IAEA and CTBTO. The role of the IAEA in facilitating the peaceful use of nuclear applications can only be fulfilled to its full extent when States agree to apply the present day standard for verification, which consists of both a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and an Additional Protocol. With the continued expansion of nuclear energy and applications, this requirement has become all the more important.

Mr. Chairman,

There can be no nuclear-weapons-free world without a nuclear-test-free world. Consequently, renewed efforts to accelerate the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) are needed. Concurrently, the roll-out of the CTBT's verification regime should be continued and its performance enhanced. Belgium, together with nine other countries, has proposed measures to this effect in a working paper submitted in view of this PrepCom (WP.28).

Today, many States are increasingly concerned over the fragility of instruments to which they are not party but which affect their national security. We therefore call upon the Russian Federation to return to compliance with the INF Treaty, which for over 30 years has offered a unique contribution to European security. At the strategic nuclear forces level, we underscore the importance of the extension of the New START treaty, which provides transparency and predictability. Its loss would remove all limits on strategic forces.

My country is fully aware of the constraints emanating from the current security environment and the build-up of distrust between some of the nuclear powers. They can however not constitute an excuse for inaction. In fact, these factors have increased the salience of certain arms control methods, such as nuclear risk reduction. A special responsibility lies with the two States holding the largest nuclear arsenals, who should pursue a strategic dialogue on effective steps to reduce nuclear tension and who should seek ways to avoid engaging in a new nuclear arms race.

All nuclear-armed states should take the necessary measures to prevent miscalculation, unauthorized or unintended use of nuclear weapons. It is incumbent upon them to continuously seek to improve the safety and security of their systems, keep them at the lowest possible alert levels and increase transparency. Any measures which appear to lower the threshold for use are inherently destabilizing. We are therefore concerned about the announcement or testing of new nuclear capabilities, which may create the perception of a comparative advantage and thus threaten to provoke unwelcome changes to current defense postures and doctrine. Here again, we see the need for strategic dialogue on doctrine and confidence building measures, such as military lines of communication. This undertaking cannot be left to only two States, as other states have been expanding their arsenals and introducing new capabilities.

On a global level, arms control will need to remain on par with technological developments, such as new missile systems, which decrease reaction time exponentially. My country is ready to take part in initiatives that tackle these issues in a practical manner.