



First Committee General Debate

Statement by H.E. Jörundur Valtýsson Permanent Representative of Iceland

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Mr Chair,

Let me join colleagues in congratulating you and the members of the Bureau on your election and wish you all the best in leading the work of the First Committee. Iceland aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by Denmark on behalf of the Nordic countries, and the European Union but let me highlight few key issues from a national perspective.

Mr Chair,

We are meeting at critical times. The global security landscape has not been more precarious since the World War II. Growing tensions, distrust, and lack of compliance have increasingly become all too prevalent - leading most states to the realisation that the global community needs to reinvigorate and recommit to the global disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.

As we meet, we are witnessing that some of the key agreements that have underpinned decades of global disarmament efforts are seriously tested and undermined by non-compliance and rapidly growing security challenges.

The sad fact is that the ongoing military aggression of a member state with a permanent seat on the Security Council against another member state of the United Nations has all but eliminated any prospects for advancing the arms control agenda.

It is tragic that the Russian Federation has engaged in a totally unprovoked and unjustifiable military action against Ukraine. This gross violation of international law and the UN Charter, undermining international peace and security, is utterly condemnable. Iceland stands in absolute solidarity with Ukraine in its fight, defending its people, its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The nuclear rhetoric and even threats of use of nuclear weapons coming from the Russian authorities is of particular concern. This repugnant rhetoric, combined with serious attempts of the invading Russian armed forces to play fast and loose with the safety of nuclear energy facilities in Ukraine, is deplorable.

Let me use this opportunity to thank the International Atomic Energy Agency, for its pivotal role in contributing to international peace and security through its safeguard agreements and the untiring work in assuring the safety of the nuclear power plants in Ukraine. The illegal and aggressive behaviour of Russia regarding the Zaporizhzhia power plant is disgraceful.

Also, the increasingly rogue behaviour of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with its illegal nuclear program in violation of UN Security Council resolutions is a serious threat to the non-proliferation regime and global security. The DPRK must return to compliance with its international obligations, in particular the NPT and IAEA Safeguards Arrangements and the CTBT.

Mr. Chair,

We must not give up on our common aim of a world free of nuclear weapons. The failure to reach consensus on advancing the implementation of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty at the 10th Review conference is sadly a further testament to the irresponsible behaviour of the Russian Federation. Some 140 states were willing and ready to move forward with the implementation of the NPT while a single state, the Russian Federation, prevented that will to be realised.

However, the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty will continue to play its crucial role in nuclear disarmament and in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons while at the same time safeguarding the benefits of nuclear technology for civilian use. The next review cycle offers the opportunity to learn from the past and re-energize efforts for full implementation of the treaty, not least Article six.

If the message from the Reykjavik Summit of the nuclear powers in 1986, “nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” has ever been applicable, it is today.

Mr. Chair

This harsh reality reinforces the need to make full use of various supporting agreements and mechanisms that cement existing nuclear disarmament arrangements.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has for more than 25 years enjoyed strong support by great majority of the UN member states. It is high time that all states, not already members, sign and ratify the treaty, particularly those states belonging to Annex II of the CTBT.

Furthermore, Iceland reaffirms its strong support for commencing negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, a treaty that would provide another important pillar to existing non-proliferation arrangements.

With the Chemical Weapons Convention we agreed that the use of chemical weapons should be an echo from a distant past, not a weapon of war or political tool, as we have experienced in recent years in Syria and with the outstanding case of Mr. Navalny. Such a use of chemical weapons is utterly unacceptable by anyone, anytime, anywhere. All such incidents should be thoroughly investigated, and the perpetrators of such heinous crimes held accountable. Iceland strongly supports the role of the OPCW and its ongoing investigative efforts.

Iceland supports stronger efforts to counter the increased vulnerability of the international community to biological threats, a vulnerability brought to fore with the Covid-19 pandemic. The 9th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention later this year must address this issue in earnest and take concrete steps to reinforce compliance and implementation.

And although weapons of mass destruction are currently demanding most of our attention, the importance of preserving, universalising, and developing treaties and initiatives in the sphere of conventional weapons is critical for global security and sustainable development - and has direct implications for many of today's conflicts.

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons continues to undermine peace, development, and human rights. We call on all UN member states to join the Arms Trade Treaty. The effective implementation of the Treaty and the Programme of Action on small arms is key to reversing this negative trend. Iceland welcomes the significant role these arms control instruments play in protecting civilians and preventing gender-based violence in conflict situations.

Mr Chair,

The growing critical role of information technology in our everyday lives, demanding access to open, free, secure, and safe cyberspace, has exposed our vulnerability to irresponsible behaviour, disinformation, invasive surveillance, and attacks by state and non-state actors. We need to reinforce our efforts to create a single process developing a Programme of Action for advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace.

Iceland welcomes the increasing attention given to outer space activities and assets that are of growing importance for our societies and sustainable development overall. It is imperative to ensure that these activities continue to be peaceful and benefit all.

Finally, Mr. Chair, Iceland reaffirms its strong belief that every effort should be made to ensure that women have an active and equal role in every arms control and disarmament process. We are encouraged by positive steps taken in relation to strengthening gender perspectives and diversity in various arms control fora. Let us reinforce and broaden this positive work to help us better meet the challenges we face.

I thank you.