



BELGIUM

Main Committee I Statement

Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

New York, 4 August 2022

Chair,

Belgium aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Allow me to add a few elements from a national point of view.

Let me at the outset confirm our full support to the proposals made by the Stockholm Initiative on stepping stones for advancing nuclear disarmament and on nuclear risk reduction. These concrete and realistic steps enjoy cross-regional backing and should inform our work in this Committee.

Chair,

We welcome the P5 reaffirmation that a nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought. The conference should endorse this statement. At the same time, we cannot ignore the aggressive nuclear rhetoric used by Russia in recent months. Words matter. Even veiled references create the sentiment of nuclear coercion and intimidation. It suggests that the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons is being lowered. Restraint in the public discourse should be restored.

The extension of the New START treaty in 2021 demonstrates that arms control continues to play an irreplaceable role in strategic stability and that concrete results are possible, even in times of growing insecurity and deep mistrust among the major powers. We are encouraged by the continued implementation of the Treaty and warmly welcome President's Biden commitment to negotiate a follow-on treaty. Nobody thinks this is going to be easy, given Russia's recent behavior. Determination and agreement on extensive verification measures will be key. We support the reduction by one third of the strategic arsenal deployed by the US and Russia and call for a rebalancing of non-strategic arsenals as part of an effective dismantling policy. Another possible measure is a freeze on the total cap of nuclear warheads.

While the holders of the two largest arsenals bear a special responsibility, all nuclear-weapon States have to play their part. Nuclear-weapon States should be judged by the same yardstick on a number of criteria such as transparency, measures to cut back the nuclear stockpile, or commitments to arms control dialogue. We welcome the reduction in stockpile and delivery systems achieved by the UK and France in recent decades. We encourage China, the only nuclear-weapon State that is still expanding its nuclear arsenal, to follow suit. A formal

moratorium of China regarding the production of fissile material for military purposes and increased transparency regarding its doctrine and posture would also constitute positive steps. Russia, for its part, should stop its war on international law and end its development of new, disruptive delivery systems.

Chair,

A world without nuclear weapons will not emerge in a world where nuclear tests are conducted. No State pleading for disarmament can refuse to accede to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. No State should wait for the action by others before taking this decision. Belgium, together with 16 other States, introduced a working paper (WP.19), offering proposals of action all States can take to reinforce the CTBT and its verification regime and to move forward towards entry into force. States, even those that are not yet member, can host International Monitoring System facilities or sign a facility agreement and thus support the completion of the IMS. The verification system has stimulated international scientific cooperation which can be fostered, including through regional cooperation. Nuclear-weapon States can already take steps towards the permanent closure and dismantlement of nuclear test sites.

The destructive power of nuclear weapons is beyond comparison. So should be our determination to eliminate them. At the same time, we should acknowledge that this destructive power forces us to apply a different disarmament approach than for other weapon systems. Irreversibility and verifiability are key principles to make lasting progress. There is no short cut to a nuclear weapon free world. Belgium's participation as an observer at the first Meeting of States Parties of the TPNW therefore does not represent a first step towards signing this treaty. The TPNW is incompatible with our NATO commitments and support for NATO's nuclear deterrence.

Disarmament without control leads to disarmament without confidence. Verification of nuclear disarmament requires the establishment of new techniques and procedures. As a member of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification Belgium actively contributes to these efforts. In this framework, Belgium organized an exercise at its national nuclear research centre (SCK CEN) to test measurement methods with regards to plutonium. Belgium also hosted the first in-person meeting of the International Partnership since the outbreak of the pandemic, in Brussels last June.