



Opening Remarks

By Sergio Duarte

Panel on Nuclear Weapon Delegitimization Study

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Thank you all for coming and welcome to the United Nations. The purpose of this meeting today is to learn about a new study on nuclear weapons that is very timely and relevant to events that are now underway at the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

The study is entitled “Delegitimizing Nuclear Weapons: Examining the Validity of Nuclear Deterrence”, prepared by Ken Berry, Patricia Lewis, Benoît Péloupidas, Nikolai Sokov and Ward Wilson and published by The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies Monterey Institute of International Studies. It was commissioned by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Let me say at the outset that it is inconceivable to have an intelligent discussion about nuclear weapons without addressing the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called this doctrine “contagious” because – in one way or another – nine countries now practice some version of it. And predictably, if another state or states acquire such weapons, rest assured that deterrence will be the primary reason such a state will cite for acquiring such weapons. In all likelihood, the argument would be made that nuclear deterrence was the “sole purpose” of acquiring such weapons.

We have all heard the familiar arguments before: such weapons are vital and essential for security; they guarantee national survival; they are the ultimate insurance policy in an unpredictable and dangerous world. Yet here a conundrum arises: if they are really so indispensable for security, then how can additional states manage to do without them? And on what grounds can a global regime focused on the goal of non-proliferation be sustained, with some states claiming the right to an ultimate defence that other states are denied?

But there are more than just practical difficulties with such claims. The International Court of Justice, in its 1996 Advisory Opinion, stated that the use of such weapons would generally be contrary to international customary and humanitarian law. And the court also agreed that if the actual use would not be legal, so too would be the threat to use such weapons. Yet this threat – seen in the form of an intent and capability to respond to any nuclear attack with a devastating nuclear counterattack – is intrinsic in the very notion of deterrence.

Last week, I had the privilege of participating in the launch of a book by former UK nuclear bomber pilot, Commander Robert Green, called *Security without Nuclear Deterrence*, which offered a compelling personal argument why nuclear weapons should be regarded as illegal, militarily useless, and immoral – and how security could be achieved without them.

Today, we have a new study questioning specifically the legitimacy of the doctrine of nuclear deterrence and the weapons on which it is based. This study critically examines both the legitimacy and the utility of nuclear weapons, and builds a strong case for their global elimination.

So I would like now to call upon the authors to provide further details about this study and to explain how the last remaining pillar rationalizing the continued existence of nuclear weapons – namely, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence – is rapidly collapsing before our eyes, and what will be the significance of this historic development for international peace and security.