

68th General Assembly of the United Nations
High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament
(New York, 26 September 2013)

Statement on behalf of France
by Mr Jacques Audibert
Director-General for Political and Security Affairs

Mr Chair,

France fully backs the speech made in the joint names of France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (P3), as well as on behalf of the European Union.

I would like to build on this speech by adding a few points from France.

Mr Chair,

France would like this High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament to reflect the importance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as the keystone of the international non-proliferation regime. Our priority is its consolidation. This of course means for France that we should fully implement the roadmap established by the action plan which was adopted by consensus in 2010. This approach, which is balanced between the three pillars and calls on States to make concrete, progressive decisions, will allow us to make progress to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in accordance with the goals of the NPT, in a way that promotes international stability and on the basis of undiminished security for all. This is the only realistic and effective avenue for multilateral disarmament. Nuclear disarmament is only meaningful if it helps to prevent an arms race in other areas. This is why it needs to be carried out in the framework of general and complete disarmament, in accordance with Article VI of the NPT.

Nuclear disarmament can only be achieved step-by-step, through successive concrete and gradual gestures. This is the only effective approach, as advocated by the 2010 Action Plan. Recent initiatives, which ignore the real strategic context and skirt around concrete measures or create parallel forums, simply undermine the Action Plan and the NPT review process.

Mr Chair,

France, along with the other four Nuclear-Weapons States, is determined to work tirelessly to fully meet its commitments by 2015. My country thus organized the first P5 follow-up meeting in 2011, following the 2010 Review Conference and ahead of the P5 follow-up meetings in Washington in 2012 and Geneva in April 2013. These meetings, forums for exchange both on factors influencing strategic stability – such as proliferation crises – and on concrete national policy matters, enhance mutual confidence, which is vital to make progress on disarmament. In Washington and Geneva, we discussed the progress of work on terminology, transparency and reporting, so as to be able to report in 2014 on the results of our efforts and the implementation of our commitments, including those linked to Actions 5, 20 and 21 of the 2010 NPT Action Plan.

Concerning nuclear disarmament, France will continue to fully shoulder its particular responsibilities as a nuclear-weapon-State. Allow me to recall the progress made by France in recent years.

We have met the target, announced in 2008, of reducing the air component of our deterrence force by one third.

This latest progress supplements an already considerable achievement.

- We have completely dismantled the ground-to-ground component of our deterrent and reduced the submarine component by one third. In total, France has reduced its arsenal by half over the last 20 or so years, unilaterally. It now has fewer than 300 nuclear warheads;
- We were the first State to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, along with the United Kingdom, and to dismantle our nuclear test site;
- We unilaterally dismantled the facilities for the production of fissile material for military purposes, with a total cost of €6 billion. This is not a one-off decision which we could go back on. It is an irreversible gesture. We ceased the production of weapons-grade plutonium in 1992 and took a similar step in 1996 regarding highly enriched uranium.

France is naturally aware of the grave consequences that the use of nuclear weapons could cause. It is on the strength of this conviction that it has never participated in any arms race, that it applies the principle of strict sufficiency and that it maintains its arsenal at the lowest possible level, compatible with the strategic context. The French deterrent is strictly defensive. It is precisely because its sole aim is to protect our vital interest and because its use would be conceivable only in extreme self-defence circumstances, a right that is enshrined in the United Nations Charter, that the French deterrent is in no way contrary to international law, as recalled by the ICJ Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996.

Mr Chair,

Our efforts at national and international level in support of disarmament should not lead to neglecting the persistent threat of proliferation crises. The continuation of the Iranian nuclear programme in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolution, like the third North Korean nuclear test this year, are threats to peace which have a negative impact on disarmament. We should act in all fields, and firstly in combating proliferation.

Multilaterally, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is an essential instrument which aims to act as a brake on the qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons. Its entry into force is vital. France calls upon all States that have not yet done so to ratify this Treaty.

Lastly, the priority for France is to do everything possible to make progress on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and in the meantime establish a moratorium on the production of these materials. This Treaty would supplement the CTBT, setting a limit on the quantitative increase of arsenals. The FMCT is the negotiation priority set by Action 15 of the Action Plan. Our preference would have been to begin negotiations immediately at the Conference on Disarmament. However, we supported the Canadian Resolution 65/73, which a very large majority of the General Assembly voted for, to make progress on talks on this

Treaty. This will then have to be negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament, as was already planned in the work programme of document CD/1864.

In the end, the goal of a world without of nuclear weapons cannot be decided abstractly. The conditions to achieve such a world must be the outcome of gradual and collective work, guided by concrete measures. Undermining the existing forums by creating parallel processes and re-opening the debate on how to proceed which was already decided in 2010 would achieve nothing and only add to the confusion. It is vital to progress on disarmament. The road ahead is decided: we need to implement the step-by step approach of the 2010 Action Plan.

Thank you.