



*Check against delivery*

**STATEMENT BY**

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1<sup>st</sup> Committee*

Nuclear Weapons Debate

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Mr. Chairman,

At the general debate, we stressed the importance of the NPT as the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. The NPT was negotiated when arsenals were built up, crises flared between superpowers, the use of nuclear weapons in conflict was repeatedly considered, and widespread proliferation – especially in Europe – was imminent.

The NPT introduced the *only* global norm prohibiting the acquisition of nuclear weapons, to which 186 states are now bound. It contains the *only* legally binding obligations regarding nuclear disarmament. It has limited the total number of nuclear weapon possessors and formed the basis for reductions of nuclear arsenals worldwide.

But it is not just about nuclear reductions or non-proliferation. Last week, two hibakusha visited our parliament and Minister. This reminds us that the achievements of the NPT helped to build a more stable and secure global order that managed to avoid the *use* of nuclear weapons. The NPT set out to prevent the devastation of nuclear war. It has helped spare us the horrors of another Hiroshima or Nagasaki, based on the understanding that humanity and international security, like idealism and realism, are complementary concepts: two sides of the same coin.

Mr. Chairman,

Some argue the current status quo is unacceptable. However, 70 years of non-use of nuclear weapons is hardly *unacceptable*. Rather, the status quo is *imperfect*. That means we have work to do.

A world without nuclear weapons is the only way to guarantee they will not be used again. No single treaty, norm, or agreement can offer the same level of protection. A rule against the use of chemical weapons existed already in 1907, but we all know what happened during WWI.

All societies have a stake in preventing a similar scenario with nuclear weapons. In the Netherlands, this fundamental truth underpins the welcome involvement of both our parliament and our civil society on this issue.

We must therefore focus, as reaffirmed by NATO's recent Warsaw communique, on effective steps and measures that will help us achieve a world without nuclear weapons in full accordance with all provisions of the NPT, including Article VI, in a step-by-step and verifiable way that promotes international stability, and is based on the principle of undiminished security for all. Allow me to highlight some of these building blocks.

First, the time for action on the FMCT is now. Last year, this Committee endorsed the substantial consensus report of the Group of Governmental Experts. However, the Conference of Disarmament in 2016 again failed to agree on a comprehensive programme of work. Therefore, the Netherlands strongly supports the call to establish two Preparatory Committees to develop recommendations on the elements needed in an FMCT, to be provided to the Conference on Disarmament for negotiation.

Second, this year marks 20 years since the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty was opened for signature. As our Minister of Foreign Affairs remarked during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary event last month, “The CTBT is a fundamental building block for nuclear disarmament, a step toward global zero.” In effect, the CTBT has been able to set a global norm against nuclear testing. This was made possible by the fact that all relevant states have subscribed to the Treaty and took part in its negotiation. The Netherlands welcomes the adoption of UNSC resolution 2310, which calls upon all states to refrain from nuclear testing and urges states to join the CTBT.

A third important building block for a nuclear-weapon-free world is verification. Not only those states currently possessing nuclear weapons will demand robust disarmament verification; us NNWS will want the same guarantees. Developing verification capacities is an important confidence-building measure, improving working relations between countries on many levels. It also further integrates NNWS in the nuclear disarmament process. We have recently seen promising new disarmament verification initiatives, such as the INPDV, and we support the call for further progress in this area, including through the establishment of a group of governmental experts.

Mr. Chairman,

A world free of nuclear weapons must comprise a comprehensive, verifiable prohibition of nuclear weapons. And a large share of countries feels that the time has come to negotiate such an instrument, or parts thereof, in the form of a ban. The Netherlands will engage constructively with this group to identify which steps towards Global Zero we can take, or which legal building blocks we can support.

This means we will look at *all* initiatives, plans or proposals with an open mind. However, in light of what is at stake we have a moral duty to assess the effectiveness and impact of new initiatives with care. I think we all agree on the fundamental principle that legal instruments must reinforce existing agreements and shared values. However, if found that they threaten to *in any way* weaken the NPT or to decrease prospects for real disarmament by creating divisiveness, all of us here, states and civil society, have the responsibility to ask *the* crucial question: does this course of action really bring us closer to a safer and nuclear-weapon-free world?

The principle of effectiveness requires nuclear weapon possessors are involved in further steps towards Global Zero. In turn, these countries have a duty to lead. The apparent inability of the nuclear-weapon states to effectuate further progress threatens the credibility of our existing disarmament and non-proliferation structures. And although considerations of security and stability must always be taken into account, they may never become a pretext for inaction.

Mr. Chairman,

I began this statement by reflecting on the regime, based on humanitarian and security-related considerations, protecting us from the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. Our steps towards a nuclear-weapon-free world must be compatible with the letter and spirit of that regime. They must, in addition, be realistic, effective and inclusive. The Netherlands stands ready to press forward with such measures.

Thank you