



**Remarks by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference 2017**

Ms Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations



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I wish to thank the EU Non-Proliferation Consortium for organizing this conference and for inviting me to speak. This event has been a fixture on the calendar of my predecessors, and I think this speaks to the importance of the close partnership between the European Union and the United Nations on matters of disarmament and non-proliferation.

I am pleased to see that the agenda for this opening session has been designed to enable us to collectively take stock of the major developments this year and to look forward to the months ahead. So, allow me to touch on key priorities in disarmament broadly in my brief remarks.

In his opening remarks to the current session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General outlined seven steps to a better world and spoke first about the nuclear peril. He was referring foremost to the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which presents the most dangerous nuclear confrontation since the end of the Cold War.

The Secretary-General has remained in close contact with the key parties concerned in support of diplomatic efforts that will bring us back to the path of denuclearization and sustainable security on the Korean Peninsula. In the meantime, he has also encouraged the urgent pursuit of measures to reduce tension, mitigate the risk of unintended escalation and build mutual confidence. We must open political window of opportunity over the months ahead to seek a way forward.

While resolving the situation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is most urgent, and it is critical to maintain the JCPOA as an integral part of the non-proliferation regime, we cannot afford to ignore the stagnating global nuclear disarmament agenda. These are linked. The current review process for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty must contend with at least two fundamental and interrelated challenges.

The first is the need for renewed and redoubled commitment by the nuclear-weapon States, at a time when arms control agreements are being strained, commitment to disarmament appears wavering and prospects for negotiations on further reductions appear dim.

The second challenge is the erosion of consensus on the best path toward a nuclear-weapon-free world. This year, many States turned their long-standing opposition to the indefinite retention of nuclear weapons into the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. The NPT, however, remains the most universal framework for agreement on practical steps leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons, as such, the cornerstone of non-proliferation and disarmament regime. Ensuring its preservation remains a top imperative. All states seem to agree on this, despite different positions on the new treaty.

Beyond what the Secretary-General has termed “the nuclear peril”, he has also called for a new focus on “disarmament that saves lives”. He was referring to the need to address the horrendous impact on civilians resulting from contemporary armed conflict.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas and of improvised explosive devices together account for the vast majority of conflict-related civilian casualties. The disarmament community will have important opportunities in 2018 to develop serious and appropriate policy responses to reverse these trends.

Unfortunately, the contemporary threats to civilians extend beyond conventional weapons. The Secretary-General has called for accountability for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. It is deeply regrettable that the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism was allowed to expire. In this connection, I appreciate the support from the EU for maintaining the readiness of the Secretary-General’s mechanism to conduct investigations into the alleged use of chemical or biological weapons.

Finally, the international community continues to struggle to keep pace with the peace and security implications posed by emerging technologies. We need to do better to keep ahead of the foreseeable challenges posed by armed unmanned aerial vehicles, artificial intelligence and autonomy, cyber capabilities, long-range conventional weapons and biotechnology. On the last point, I am again grateful for the support by the EU for advancing the objectives of the Biological Weapons Convention.

With respect to addressing the global challenges we face; the United Nations remains indispensable in finding solutions. Achieving peace and security through disarmament was one of the very reasons for which the Organization was founded.

I can, however, only give a mixed prognosis on the UN’s disarmament bodies. No one in this room needs me to spend time addressing the situation in the Conference on Disarmament. We must redouble our efforts to bring the CD back to work, but we can also be thankful that the UN disarmament machinery has many other adaptable components.

Due to the paralysis at the CD, and also perhaps to the growing multipolarity of international affairs, the General Assembly has recently become the most vibrant setting for the development of new norms. The Disarmament Commission has also shown new signs of life, which I hope continues with a positive decision to take up a new item next year on advancing transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space.

Looking ahead, in light of the nature of the challenges we face, it is difficult to imagine the possibility of any quick fixes. But there are perhaps a few truths worth recalling, as we turn to the

priority of resuscitating the NPT review process in a difficult political climate. In the interest of time, I will only mention two.

The first is the historical role of arms control in easing international tensions and providing a pathway for the resolution of conflicts and disputes.

The second is the fact that disarmament was meant to form the basis for the international security architecture embodied by the United Nations Charter, rather than an objective that can be postponed until all international disputes are resolved.

I think that if we approach the remainder of the NPT review cycle with these truths in mind, it should be possible to find a path back to consensus and progressive action leading to a world without nuclear weapons.

I look forward to the interventions of my co-panelists and discussing these issues further with all of you.

Thank you.