



**Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: Third
Preparatory Committee Session of the 2020 Review Cycle**

**Side event: “Unlocking disarmament diplomacy through a
stepping stone approach”**

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High Representative for Disarmament Affairs**



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Distinguished panellists,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be part of this event. Support for resuming dialogue and negotiations for nuclear arms control and disarmament is a key part of the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda, "Securing Our Common Future," and forms the substance of the first action. I am grateful to Sweden for having chosen to Champion this action.

As everyone in this room realises all too well, our efforts to achieve the collective goal of a world free of nuclear weapons have, at best, stagnated and, at worst, are beginning to go backwards.

Relationships are eroding between nuclear-armed States, exacerbated by the absence of trust and lines of communication. States continue to seek security through weapons instead of dialogue, leading to destabilizing arms racing dynamics. Those States that possess nuclear weapons have reversed over three decades of progress by increasing the emphasis on the utility and possession of nuclear weapons in their national doctrines. Should the New START Treaty expire without a successor, it will be the first time in some fifty years that strategic nuclear arsenals have no constraints.

Given these new challenges, in February, Secretary-General Guterres told the Conference on Disarmament that the world needed a new vision for arms control that matched our complex environment of today.

In that context I welcome Sweden's decision, together with BASIC, to put forward this endeavour.

At the heart of the "Stepping stone approach" is – as I see it – both a realization that the deteriorating international security environment makes progress on nuclear disarmament challenging and an optimism that there are nevertheless avenues for such progress.

It is important to find these avenues. Many of the proposed stepping stones in this initiative are also proposals that the Disarmament Agenda considers as beneficial in reducing current risks and seeking a world free of nuclear weapons.

The pursuit and achievement of such measures could serve as “stepping stones” on the road to complete nuclear disarmament, strengthening relationships between negotiating parties and re-establishing habits of consultation and negotiation. They may also contribute to rebuilding trust and creating tangible, immediate security benefits for States and their peoples. This approach could also help to improve the international security environment itself. It is important to realize and accept that this environment does not exist as an external factor surrounding us – it is the product of relations between States. Agreement on “stepping stone” measures, including by States possessing nuclear weapons, could have important, beneficial knock-on effects.

It is important, however, to remember that there is not one single approach to achieving the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. While we all share the same goal, divergent ideas and approaches exist as to the best and most expeditious way of making this shared goal a shared reality. The good news is that these approaches are not mutually exclusive: we can make progress on multiple fronts.

There is room for parallel approaches, including those that take into account past commitments and the continued need for bold and visionary leadership towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

All States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), including the nuclear-weapon States, have undertaken a number of obligations and commitments related to nuclear disarmament. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the nuclear-weapon States’ unequivocal undertaking of 2000 to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament, which was reiterated in 2010.

The faithful implementation of obligations and commitments freely undertaken is a fundamental building block of international relations. States Parties should therefore expect to be held accountable, and for their actions to be measured against past commitments. It is my sincere hope that concrete “stepping stones” will lead to progress towards the complete implementation of these commitments and obligations.

A “stepping stone” approach is a timely example of the creative thinking our current predicament requires. As the Secretary-General’s agenda makes clear, there is an urgent need for near-term practical measures that can jumpstart dialogue and negotiations, increase

transparency and confidence-building measures, reinforce vital instruments such as the NPT, and, ultimately, take us forward to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

I wish you the best of luck in your endeavour and please know that you can count on the support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

I thank you.