Statement
by H.E. Archbishop Bernadito C. Auza
Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York
at the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
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Madam President,

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the beginning of the Review Conference of the NPT, this tragic event should be a reminder of the importance of this instrument as a means to rid humanity of the risks of nuclear war. The victims are still with us. The Hibakusha are a living testimony calling all of us to take the right decisions today if we do not want to face similar situations tomorrow. The very reason of the NPT is anchored in the dignity of the human person and in the collective recognition of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any nuclear detonation.

The world's nuclear arsenals still contain far too many of these weapons. Indeed, the very existence of these arms and the different military doctrines do not definitively rule out their use. The theory of nuclear deterrence is too ambiguous to be a stable and global basis of world security and international order. On the contrary, these weapons are per se inhumane and unethical. This is why the NPT was negotiated. The hopes that have been placed by some in the system of deterrence as a strategy for preventing nuclear weapons use and for providing a stable security did not deliver the sort of peace and stability expected.

The risks of nuclear weapons are well known. The instruments developed during the last 50 years show that the nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear states alike are aware of the exceptional instability caused by these weapons. The instability is greater in some regions than in others and more acute in some periods than others. The consequences of this instability are too important to be adopted as a basis for a genuine, peaceful and stable international order. The NPT is far from the idea that the balance of terror is the best basis for the political, economic and cultural stability in the world.

The risks and the instability connected with the existence of nuclear weapons are an urgent call to take concrete and effective steps to address this situation by renewing collectively the commitment to nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament which stand at the heart of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It cannot be doubted that the safest and most sure path toward non-use is the mutual and total renunciation of these weapons, and the effective dismantling of the infrastructure on which they depend. It is this vision of the future, an achievable future without nuclear weapons, and the commitment which was taken many years ago that bring us together. The NPT is an important instrument for the security of all. The failure to translate in good faith the obligations contained therein constitutes a real threat to the survival of humanity as a whole.

Madam President,

The discriminatory nature of the NPT is well known. The discrimination between countries with and countries without nuclear weapons cannot be a permanent solution. This situation was meant to be provisory. The status quo is unsustainable and undesirable. If it is unthinkable to imagine a world where nuclear weapons are available to all, it is reasonable to imagine, and to work collectively for, a world where nobody has them. Moreover, this is our reading of the letter and the spirit of the NPT.

The very possession of nuclear weapons will continue to come at an enormous financial cost. The expenditures, current and projected, represent resources that could, and indeed should, be put toward the development of societies and people. Pope Francis put it strongly in his message to the President of the Vienna Conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons: "Spending on nuclear weapons squanders the wealth of nations. To prioritize such spending is a mistake and a misallocation of resources which would be far better invested in the areas of integral human development, education, health and the fight against extreme poverty. When these resources are squandered, the poor and the weak living on the margins of society pay the price."

In fact, the world faces enormous challenges (extreme poverty, environmental problems, migration flows, military conflicts, regular economic crises, etc.). Only cooperation and solidarity among nations is able to confront them. To continue investing in expensive weapon systems is paradoxical. In particular, to continue investing in the production and the modernization of nuclear weapons is not logical. Billions are wasted each year to develop and maintain stocks that will supposedly never be used. Is it not legitimate to ask the question whether these investments are not in contradiction with the spirit of the NPT?

It must be recognized that possession of nuclear weapons and the reliance on nuclear deterrence have a very negative impact on the inter-relations of states. National

security often comes up in discussions on nuclear weapons. This concept shouldn't be used in a partial and biased manner and never in contradiction with the common good. All States have the right to national security. Why is it that the security of some can only be met with a particular type of weapon whereas other States must ensure their security without them? On the other hand, reducing peace and the security of States, in practice, to its military dimension is artificial and simplistic. Socio-economic development, political participation, respect for fundamental human rights, strengthening the rule of law, cooperation and solidarity at the regional and international level, etc. are essential to the national security of States. Is it not urgent to revisit in a transparent manner the definition made by States, especially the nuclear weapons states, of their national security?

All of us are aware that the goal of a world without nuclear weapons is not easy to achieve. As many say, it is a complex and difficult issue. All human realities are difficult and complex. But this is neither a reason nor an excuse not to implement the obligations undertaken in conformity with the NPT. For this, all energies and commitments are necessary. They are even more necessary in the times of international tensions. The role of international organizations, religious communities, civil society, and academic institutions is vital to not let hope die, nor to let cynicism and realpolitik take over. Ethics based on the threat of mutually assured destruction is not worthy of future generations. Only an ethic of cooperation, solidarity and peaceful coexistence is a great project for the future of humanity.

Lack of concrete and effective nuclear disarmament will lead sooner or later to real risks of nuclear proliferation. This Review Conference is a challenge for all States parties. Failure is not an option. The erosion of the credibility of the NPT could have catastrophic consequences for all countries and for the future of humanity as a whole.

To conclude, I would like to quote again Pope Francis: "Nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence among people and states. The youth of today and tomorrow deserve far more. They deserve a peaceful world order based on the unity of the human family, grounded on respect, cooperation, solidarity and compassion." This is the raison d'être of the NPT.

I thank you, Madam President.