

Promoting a successful outcome to the 2021 NPT Review Conference
Event organized by Austria, Kazakhstan and Switzerland – 28/4/21
Statement by HE Gustavo Zlauvinen, President-designate

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

I would like to start by thanking the Permanent Missions of Austria, Kazakhstan and Switzerland to the International Organizations in Vienna for co-organizing this event, and Tariq Rauf for arranging it. All three States Parties have been committed supporters of the NPT and, more broadly, to the goal of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. The speakers from each of those missions that we will hear from today have individually proven themselves to be champions of that goal.

I would also like to take the opportunity to express my sympathy and solidarity for all those who have suffered through this terrible pandemic. COVID-19 continues to take the lives of thousands and upend the lives of millions. It is a reminder how seemingly low probability threats, such as a new pathogen or the use of nuclear weapons, can become all too real, all too quickly.

Before turning to the substance of the Treaty and potential issues to be discussed at the Review Conference, I want to briefly touch on the question that is at the forefront of everyone's minds – will the Review Conference be held in August as planned?

As I have said before, ensuring the Review Conference can proceed as planned depends on developments related to the pandemic in New York and worldwide, as well as regarding the status of the UN headquarters. The situation is still extremely fluid and how the world will look in August remains unclear. I will hold consultations with States Parties in May on this exact question with the aim of having a decision on whether to proceed as planned. I should also note that this issue is not one that is unique to New York – it is the same across all UN headquarters, including in Geneva and Vienna.

Whenever the Review Conference is held, it will not change the context within which it is being held. The risks posed by nuclear weapons – their proliferation and their potential use – are growing as a result of the ratcheting up of competition between those States that possess them, because of simmering regional tensions and due to historic achievements in science and technology that are redefining armed conflict and concepts of deterrence.

It may no longer be the fiftieth anniversary of the NPT's entry into force, but we must all remain mindful of the fact that this Treaty has helped keep the world safe for more than half a century. It is all of our responsibility to ensure that it continues to do so for as long as it is needed.

A meaningful conclusion to the Tenth Review Conference will be important for doing so. To this end, I continued to undertake extensive virtual consultations with States Parties in capitals, New York, Geneva and Vienna. I have also met with cross-regional groups and individual States.

Additionally, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, together with partners such as the IAEA, has been holding a series of events to provide a forum for other stakeholders – including NGOs, industry and academia – to engage in dialogue on how to achieve success.

These events have, to a large extent, also focused on how to hold an inclusive Review Conference. This is an idea that I thoroughly endorse because I believe that a plurality of views helps produce lasting results. In the context of the Review Conference, this means providing equitable and meaningful participation for women, space for civil society to express their views, an opportunity for industry to participate, and a platform for the younger generations to have their say.

Despite the fluidity surrounding the Conference's postponement, many States have taken the opportunity to engage on issues of substance. Indeed, perhaps the only upside from the pandemic has been the opportunity for enhanced engagement.

Having said that, I do not expect that final positions will be known until the Conference itself, given the shifting nature of international affairs right now.

Nevertheless, my consultations have revealed an ongoing commitment to the Treaty and its goals, with a desire for an outcome that emphasizes balance and the mutually reinforcing nature of the three pillars – disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

A majority of states have expressed concerns about the negative trends in disarmament. Many have stressed the urgency of measures to reduce nuclear risks – especially those at the intersection of technology and nuclear weapons. At the same time, other States have cautioned that any risk reduction measures need to be directly linked to concrete progress in disarmament – and not a mere substitute for it.

Others have cited the need for greater transparency by the nuclear-weapon States, and commitments to further reductions in arsenals. There have been numerous calls for all States Parties to reaffirm the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and to preventing any use of nuclear weapons. Linked to this are increased concerns about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and, additionally, how to deal with the TPNW.

There has been strong support for the Conference to advocate for the entry into force of the CTBT and negotiations on an FMCT, as well as strengthened and legally binding approaches to negative security assurances. Charting a pathway forward in disarmament will, therefore, be an important goal for the Review Conference.

Proliferation concerns remains a sensitive topic for many. It has been repeatedly noted that circumstances around the JCPOA on Iran’s nuclear programme are moving too fast to predict how it will impact the Review Conference, although calls for all parties to return to full compliance retain strong support.

On the issue of North Korea, the need for complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament of its programme is a priority for States, and thus the calls for a diplomatic solution for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Perhaps not surprisingly, States Parties have also been focused on regional issues – primarily the implementation of the long unfulfilled 1995 resolution on the Middle East. Progress on this issue is essential for many States Parties, with some noting the link to the 2019 UN General Assembly-mandated conference, and others to the universalization of the NPT. It is apparent that recognition of the 1995 resolution and the need for urgent progress will once again be important to success at the Review Conference.

There has also been a substantial and, I believe, unprecedented, focus on the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology and their connection to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals. There is a growing recognition of how valuable developments in this sphere are to health, agriculture and climate change and how much importance States Parties place upon them. I have heard significant support for exploring what the NPT can do to strengthen facilitation of access to peaceful uses, while supporting and adding value to the work of IAEA.

Finally, strengthening safeguards in the face of mounting proliferation challenges caused by technological developments and regional conflict remains a priority for many States Parties. There remains much support for universalization of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and for all relevant States to adopt the modified Small Quantities Protocol. Debates continue over voluntary versus required measures in terms of the safeguards' standard, but there seems to be confidence that common ground can be reached. I hope that States Parties will use the Review Conference to discuss the changing drivers of proliferation and how to address them.

Perhaps the loudest theme I have heard throughout my consultations relates to the status of commitments undertaken at previous Review Conferences and, for the most part, on the failure to implement them. This is especially the case for those related to Pillar I. I have heard many calls for the need to strengthen accountability for the enhanced implementation of commitments, including through measures such as benchmarks or compulsory reporting.

It is worth noting that part of the NPT's enduring success rests on the commitments its States Parties have undertaken in good faith. Resolving this issue is central not only to the Tenth Review Conference, but to the future of the Treaty.

No doubt those who have heard me speak before will be tired of hearing me say that it is not my responsibility to devise an outcome to the Review Conference. But it is a fact that this is entirely the purview of States Parties. Having said that, based on my consultations it does seem as though there is much to draw on. I hope that States Parties will now focus on flexibility and compromise for the sake of our common good. I trust they will continue to work to narrow divergences and expand common ground.

As the great Nelson Mandela said: "Where people of goodwill get together and transcend their differences for the common good, peaceful and just solutions can be found even for those problems which seem most intractable."

The issues at the core of this treaty are of consequence to the entire international community. It is therefore the responsibility of States Parties, on behalf of the global population, to ensure the NPT is fit for purpose and able to meet rising challenges.

I look forward to working with you all as we seek to utilize the Tenth NPT Review Conference to advance this cause.

Thank you.