



Conference on Disarmament

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve, Permanent Representative of Belgium Geneva, 28 February 2022

Madam President,

Allow me first to wish you every success in your duties as President of the Conference on Disarmament. Please be assured of the full support of my delegation in carrying out your responsibilities.

Madam President,

I cannot begin this speech without referring to the shocking situation in Ukraine. Belgium condemns in the strongest terms the unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation, aided by Belarus. This attack is a flagrant violation of international law and the fundamental principles on which the rules-based international order is based. Russia must immediately and unconditionally cease military operations and withdraw all forces from Ukrainian territory.

Moreover, the references made to a possible nuclear dimension in this conflict have a chilling effect. They demonstrate once more the resurgence of the nuclear threat in international discourse and the associated risks this evolution entails. Coupled with the modernization of nuclear arsenals and the development of new, destabilizing nuclear capabilities, it illustrates a dangerous, regressive curve in nuclear disarmament.

Madam President,

Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should apply equally to all nuclear-weapon States. We therefore expect an equal commitment and the same degree of political will on the part of the States concerned. However, we notice significant differences:

- Today, not all States with nuclear weapons apply the same standards of transparency.
- There is only one nuclear-weapon State that has irreversibly dismantled its nuclear test sites.
- We also note that there remains one armed State that has not committed to a formal moratorium on the production of fissile material for military purposes.

We encourage states with nuclear weapons to learn from the best examples and aim for the most ambitious policies.

States outside the NPT should not escape their responsibility either. Here too, the evolution is not positive. Increasing nuclear warheads, pursuing triads, and introducing new systems are all moves away from our goal of a world without nuclear weapons. I call on Israel, India, and Pakistan to choose the right side of history and join the NPT without delay and without preconditions.

Madam President,

The Conference on Disarmament has its role to play. We welcome the adoption of the decision on the work of the Conference and we congratulate you and your predecessor for your efforts in this regard. However, strong political will and pragmatic commitment will be needed from all CD members in order to overcome the current stalemate affecting the CD.

First and foremost, the Conference on Disarmament should initiate negotiations on a treaty prohibiting the production of fissile material for the manufacture of weapons and other nuclear explosive devices (FMCT). Such a treaty would help to make the reduction of nuclear arsenals irreversible.

Recent efforts outside the Conference have helped to prepare the ground. They have demonstrated that substantive issues, including the question of the scope of the treaty, can only be resolved through effective treaty negotiations. Indeed, the issue of existing stocks is not a binary choice: it can only be satisfactorily managed within the framework of treaty negotiations. This question should therefore not condition the opening of these negotiations.

Madam President,

Real stockpile reductions of all types of nuclear weapons should be combined with political measures to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized attacks. Belgium is fully prepared to engage in these efforts and current developments in Europe remind us of this urgent need. However, while risk reduction meets an existential need, it cannot substitute for tangible progress in disarmament.

Madam President,

A world without nuclear weapons will not emerge in a world where nuclear tests are carried out. No state advocating disarmament can refuse to join the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. No State should wait for the action of others before taking this decision. We need a legally binding and universal standard, as well as an internationally recognized and effective verification mechanism. There is no alternative to the CTBT. We are delighted that the CTBT membership is growing and that the group of non-signatories is shrinking.

Finally, Madam President,

Belgium promotes the equal participation of women in the field of disarmament. The lack of consensus on a technical update of the CD Rules of Procedure in this regard last year was highly regrettable. We would be grateful if the presidency would give this issue the time and attention it deserves during our work.

Thank you.