



## **BELGIUM**

### **Statement by H.E. Hadja Lahbib, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Foreign Trade**

#### **Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)**

##### **General Debate**

**1 August 2022**

Mr. Chairman,

Let me first congratulate you on assuming the chairmanship of the NPT Review Conference and warmly thank you for the transparent and inclusive preparation process of this conference. Please be assured of the full cooperation of my delegation in performing your responsibilities.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union.

Mr. Chairman,

Unfortunately, Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war against Ukraine confronts us again with potential nuclear threat. The severity of this situation commands that all peace-loving nations not only condemn Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and demand its unconditional withdrawal. Belgium also condemns any discourse implying nuclear coercion, and any action putting Ukraine's nuclear safety and security at risk.

When looking at the deterioration of relationships between the global powers and Russia's utter disregard for international law, it becomes clear what formidable challenge this conference is facing. The major proliferation files remain unresolved. Arms control treaties have fallen apart. Compliance issues have sapped trust in the durability of legal agreements. Moreover, a rift has grown within our community on the path forward towards nuclear disarmament.

This bleak picture should inform our debate, but not weaken our resolve. Consider what is at stake. The NPT is a bulwark against nuclear weapons spread. It offers States the benefits of the atom, whether it is for energy or for cancer therapy. It provides security and technological development. It is therefore our collective responsibility to recommit to the global rules-based order and make every effort for success at this conference. No single issue should take the outcome hostage.

Our past commitments have not become obsolete. The 2010 action plan still offers a firm footing for progress in all three clusters of the NPT. We should now discuss its implementation and agree on tangible measures to realize the lofty goals of the NPT.

Belgium is gravely concerned by the alarming expansion of Iran's nuclear programme both in fissile material and know how. Iran should return to compliance with its international obligations and allow the IAEA to carry out its verification activities without hindrance. The Iran file shows the importance of the Additional Protocol: it is our guarantee for effective control of the nuclear programme beyond any JCPoA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) expiry date. This observation extends beyond the Iran case. There needs to be a renewed push for universalization of the Additional Protocol, because experience has demonstrated that a safeguards agreement alone is not enough to detect secret programmes.

North Korea continues to flout the international rules. Appeasement is not an option. International pressure on the regime must be maintained, including through the strict application of sanctions by all States without exceptions.

Mr. Chairman,

We cannot be satisfied by the current pace of nuclear disarmament. Nuclear weapon states need to undertake further action. No member of the NPT is exempt from the obligations under Article VI. We regret that China is the only nuclear-weapon State that is rapidly increasing its nuclear stockpile. Other States are modernizing their arsenals or introducing new, potentially destabilizing delivery systems.

Actual stockpile reductions of all types of nuclear weapons should be coupled with policy steps to reduce the risk of accidental or unauthorized attacks. In this context, Belgium supports the Stockholm Initiative working document on nuclear risk reduction. However, while risk reduction responds to an existential need, it cannot become a substitute for tangible progress on disarmament.

Disarmament without control leads to disarmament without confidence. Verification of nuclear disarmament requires the establishment new techniques and procedures. Several initiatives are dedicated to this task and Belgium is actively contributing to the efforts of one of them, namely the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification, which met in Brussels last June.

There can be no nuclear-weapon-free world without a nuclear-test-free world. Belgium, together with 16 other States, introduced a working paper (WP.19), offering propositions of action all States can take to reinforce the CTBT and its verification regime and to move forward towards entry into force. Allow me to end with appeal. I call in particular upon each Annex 2 State to accede to the Treaty without waiting for others to do so first.

Thank you.