



Belgium

National Statement as an Observer

Second Meeting of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

New York, 27 November – 1 December 2023

Chair,

Let me start by congratulating you on assuming the presidency of this meeting.

Chair,

Unfortunately, the war in 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, but also condemn its irresponsible nuclear rhetoric.

Chair,

The unparalleled destructive power of nuclear weapons not only reminds us of the need to make headway on the road towards global zero, it also forces us to adopt a specific approach, which cannot be a mere copy of policies applied to other weapon systems. Interlocking agreements between nuclear-weapon States are key and should be underpinned by the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and reciprocity. Recent events, in particular Russia's blatant violation of international rules and the agreements it is a party of, have strengthened our conviction that there can no longer be trust. Verification has become an even more decisive factor for success in arms control. China's unconstrained nuclear build-up represents another challenge, which strengthens our belief in the necessity of arms control dialogues leading to mutual, gradual and verified steps towards nuclear disarmament.

Chair,

To these ends, Belgium has not chosen the path of adherence to TPNW. Although we remain interested in hearing others' viewpoints and though we are ready to look at how mutual efforts can lead to progress towards a world without nuclear weapons, our presence cannot be interpreted as a first step towards Belgium's adherence to the TPNW. This adherence is not in line with our disarmament approach and, moreover, incompatible with our commitments as a NATO member. Belgium therefore fully supports NATO's nuclear deterrence posture.

Chair,

An unequivocal recommitment to the NPT and the non-proliferation regime it establishes is needed. This is all the more important given the extremely challenging circumstances under which the NPT is operating. The lack of consensus on a formal outcome at the review conference of 2022 is concerning. The path forward however is clear: full implementation of the Action Plan of 2010.

Much more concerning than the review process are the real life developments. Iran is making unchecked progress in its nuclear programme, expanding its stockpile of enriched uranium and gaining irreversible technical knowledge. The DPRK is rapidly enhancing its missile and nuclear capabilities. These two situations have the potential of upending the non-proliferation architecture and provoking a cascade effect in the region and beyond. A stronger and more united stance of the international community is needed to make these countries change course. The time left to react is dwindling.

Moreover, we should strengthen the institutions underpinning the non-proliferation regime. No State claiming to fight for global zero can refuse to join the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the sole instrument providing for a full-scale verification system regarding nuclear testing. There can be no world without nuclear weapons in a world with nuclear testing. Absence of progress regarding adherence by Annex II States is regrettable, but it cannot serve as an excuse for other States not to do the right thing. In this regard, we welcome the accession over the last years of a number of non Annex II States.

Chair,

The IAEA is the NPT's right arm to ensure compliance with article II of the Treaty. Real life experience, not diplomatic theory, has shown that a comprehensive safeguards agreement alone is insufficient to provide reliable assurance that a country does not possess nuclear material for non-peaceful use. Therefore, an Additional Protocol should not be seen as an accessory, but as part and parcel of the current verification standard. This is all the more important for States having or developing nuclear programmes.

Chair,

There can be no successful nuclear disarmament without verification. Different ongoing initiatives aim at better understanding the challenges of verifying dismantlement and at finding methodological and technical solutions. Belgium contributes to the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification and hosted a large-scale exercise in September. We hope all States will work together to support and strengthen this issue within the NPT framework.

Thank you, Chair.