

National statement at the Vienna Conference, December 2014

Thank you Chair

I wish to express Ireland's appreciation to Minister Sebastian Kurz for hosting this, the first Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons to take place within the European Union. We note the important messages to the Conference from the Secretary General of the United Nations, the ICRC, Pope Francis and other religious leaders and from President Heinz Fischer of Austria. We have been impressed by the range of experts and the scope and depth of information presented. This must guide the discussion on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation up to and at NPT Review Conference.

We also acknowledge the presence in the hall of a large number of civil society members and representatives of international organisations, of Ms. Setsuko Thurlow, a Hiroshima survivor and other Hibakusha. Her story and those of the victims of nuclear testing need to be front and centre in our discussions on nuclear weapons. The appalling human cost of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs was the genesis of the NPT. The moving accounts of the effects of nuclear weapons are the reason why another detonation must never be allowed to happen again under any circumstances.

The risks associated with nuclear weapons, about which new research has emerged, particularly in the UK and US, highlight all Governments' duty of care to their citizens. In our view, Governments are obliged to ensure their citizens are given information about these persistent risks. Citizens – both men and women – can then make an informed judgement about whether the risks are being adequately managed and, in certain States,

whether possession of nuclear weapons is worth those risks. States for their part are, we would argue, both duty-bound and treaty-bound to comply urgently with all of their obligations under the NPT – including particularly Article VI.

Since the NPT was indefinitely extended in 1995, the record on implementing disarmament obligations has been as follows: the thirteen practical steps of 2000 remain largely unimplemented; the 2005 Review Conference did not achieve an agreed outcome; and the 2010 Conference still has to be judged, although some nuclear weapons states already say they cannot disarm further.

Furthermore, the modernisation and replacement programmes with time frames extending several decades into the future are hard to reconcile with the commitments given in the thirteen practical steps and the 2010 Action Plan.

Questions must soon be asked about the seriousness of our collective commitment to Article VI, to the NPT as a whole and to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The reduction in nuclear weapons numbers since the height of the Cold War is very welcome but is not, as is often asserted, evidence that Article VI is being implemented. Article VI does not call for "reductions"; it calls for an effective multilateral framework for the achievement of an end to the nuclear arms race at an early date, and for nuclear disarmament.

Nuclear weapons cannot in our opinion be viewed as somehow more "necessary" or "legitimate" or "justifiable" than other weapons of mass destruction. Why should they be? Is that because of a belief in their value

as a deterrent? Then why has this deterrent failed to prevent conflicts breaking out in various regions in which the parties directly or indirectly involved have nuclear weapons in their arsenals?

We do not accept the doctrine of nuclear deterrence and question whether these weapons have military utility or value.

The risks of a nuclear detonation which we have heard much about over the past few days and which have been written about persuasively by the UK's Chatham House and by Eric Schlosser from the US surely make progress on nuclear disarmament more urgent. The New Agenda Coalition, of which Ireland is a member along with Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa, took the initiative at the NPT Preparatory Committee earlier this year and proposed discussions on a framework of effective measures for nuclear disarmament, without prescribing either a forum or an outcome, based on a suggested series of obligations and prohibitions that had been set out by Egypt earlier in the Review Cycle. With Mexico and then New Zealand as Coordinators, the NAC will be building on this initiative as we move towards the NPT Review Conference in 2015.

The facts regarding the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons presented here, during last weekend's Civil Society Forum, and in Oslo and Nayrit, are undeniable. As we approach the 70th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the 50th anniversary of the NPT, we recall the deep concern for human suffering which prompted the Treaty in the first place. We are running out of chances to deliver on the promise of the NPT and the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons.