

OEWG on taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations

Geneva, 25 February 2016

Panel II on Other Measures that could contribute to Nuclear Disarmament Transparency, Risk reduction, and Awareness Raising regarding the Humanitarian consequences of any nuclear detonation

Remarks

Chairman, Distinguished Panellists

Thank you for your interesting, stimulating presentations.

Ireland believes that, while pursuing those effective legal measures for which we heard the case made so clearly at the Panel 1 discussion, as long as nuclear weapons continue to exist, it is imperative that measures are taken to provide reassurances by their possessors, in relation to transparency and risk reduction. It is also imperative that awareness is raised regarding the complex interplay of effects, in particular in respect of humanitarian consequences, which any detonation, accidental or deliberate, might have. I would like to acknowledge the excellent presentations from our panel today with regard to these questions.

I would like, in the first instance, to address the question of risk in relation to these weapons. The risks associated with nuclear weapons, about which new research and information continues to emerge, is deeply troubling. I am not even speaking primarily here of the current challenges to global security, and

the possibility of one of today's conventional conflicts escalating to a nuclear one, though that cannot be completely ruled out as a deeply troubling possibility. Neither am I speaking of the growing challenges posed by the power and strength of Non-State Actors in many countries or indeed the threats posed by cyber system vulnerabilities.

Thanks to the information and the papers presented to the three Humanitarian Initiative Conferences, we now know that the risk of an *accidental* detonation, even in those States which we would regard as pursuing a high standard with regard to the security and maintenance of their nuclear arsenals, is far higher than we had previously, and perhaps too complacently, thought. For, irrespective of what processes are in place, the potential for human error remains. We would be naïve, idealistic and I would argue, arrogant, to assume that humanity, with all our flaws, failings and weaknesses, can retain nuclear weapons and yet completely avoid accidents and out of control incidents. The questions which have been raised by recent research, and the panel, into the security surrounding nuclear weapons holdings are of great concern. Risks which include the mental health of security personnel, lapses in basic security and safety precautions, as well as issues around transfer and transit of nuclear and fissile materials, are ones which require serious consideration, in view of the appalling consequences of accidents or the weapons falling into the wrong hands.

The risks highlighted by recent research, including by well-regarded institutes such as Chatham House and SIPRI among others, and which have highlighted **Thirteen KNOWN incidents** of near nuclear weapons use between 1962 and

2002, demonstrate a number of imperatives. While nuclear weapons continue to exist, the countries which possess and store them need to be much more honest with their citizens about the risks which the weapons pose, and the security measures which are in place to reduce that risk and respond to accidents. Given the serious and irreversible impact of a nuclear accident or detonation, this is an obligation which nuclear possessor states have: to their neighbours, their own citizens, and to the wider world.

In today's world, risk assessment is carried out routinely on even the most minor and seemingly insignificant administrative matters. It would therefore surely be appropriate to have reassurances that the world's nuclear weapons are held safely and securely, in a manner which is both transparent and verifiable. Given the risks that citizens and the global community are being asked to tolerate through the continued existence of these weapons, it would not seem unreasonable to ask that their possessors be open and upfront with their citizens, their neighbours and the wider world surrounding the risks which these weapons pose, and the measures which have been taken to mitigate those risks.

Global climate change may be the greatest long-term risk to the survival of the planet and everyone on it but the nuclear risk is actually the more immediate one as it could happen tomorrow and, if so, in an instant. And while a single accidental nuclear detonation might not lead to nuclear winter or the end of the world it would kill vast numbers and leave large uninhabitable areas, with consequent impacts on environment, health, food production and movements of people. We are daily bearing witness to the impact of conventional warfare and in particular the use of explosive weapons with a wide area impact in

populated areas on movements of people. To quote a former Head of the Global Security Initiative, in the wake of a nuclear detonation “all other issues will instantly become trivial by comparison”.

While complete elimination of the weapons is evidently the only way to eliminate the risks they pose completely, in the meantime who can argue that the global community and all our citizens would not benefit from far greater transparency in relation to them than currently exists. We welcome, in this regard, the transparency and confidence building measures which have been put in place already. We would, however, wish to see much more regular and more detailed reporting from all States which possess nuclear weapons. These reports should ideally be in a common and easily accessible format.

I think we can all agree, and the panel have clearly demonstrated, the need to raise awareness of the complex nexus of inter-related challenges for humanity which would be posed by any nuclear detonation. Great credit is due to Norway, Mexico and Austria for hosting three international conferences on the subject of humanitarian consequences. Without them, it would have been difficult to reach as wide an audience or to have gained the momentum which we now have. Ireland has been engaged from the outset in promoting information about the human cost of a nuclear explosion.

The testimony of the survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the visible and multi-generational effects on innocent civilians of nuclear explosions, provide adequate reasons why nuclear weapons should never be used again. In fact,

while those images were fresh in the minds of those negotiating the NPT, there was a clear humanitarian inspiration for the Treaty. Our then Foreign Minister Frank Aiken strove to put the humanitarian element at the heart of the efforts to conclude the Treaty, including in the related UN resolutions.

Mr Chairman,

For Ireland, apart from the clarity of the presenters from the ICRC and other humanitarian organisations with regard to the lack of global capacity to respond to a nuclear detonation, the other question which most resonated with us was the research on the gendered impact of nuclear weapons presented at the Vienna Conference. This demonstrated in the clearest terms, the different impact which nuclear radiation has on men and on women. The researcher, Mary Olson of the Nuclear Information and Research Service, found that exposure to ionising radiation affects women and children to a far greater extent than adult men, while leading to double the risk of lifetime cancer incidence for females than for males. Among a range of chilling presentations on risks, consequences, and global lack of response capacity, this one finding alone, places nuclear weapons at the centre stage of the gender and disarmament debate. Knowing the devastating impact that radiation from a nuclear weapons detonation has on women's and girls' health, how can their possession continue to be consistent with international humanitarian law or human rights law and obligations.

This is an aspect of nuclear weapons which Ireland is committed to bringing forward and heightening awareness on, in line with our commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related commitments. Many of you were

present at the well-attended Side Event which we organized last May in New York at the NPT Review Conference with the support of Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Trinidad and Tobago and Costa Rica. We look forward to further work and to continuing to raise awareness in relation to this deeply concerning and little appreciated aspect of nuclear weapons use. We look forward to seeing this concern reflected in the final Report of this OEWG and we would be pleased to hear the views of the Panel on this point.

Thank you