Opening Remarks

By

Angela Kane
High Representative
United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

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for the 2015 NPT Review Conference
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I am grateful for this honour to address the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 NPT Review Conference as it commences its second session. I wish at the outset to congratulate Ambassador Cornel Feruta of Romania as he assumes his duties as Chair of this session. Along with my staff in the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, I look forward to assisting him and all delegations throughout the review process.

The start of a new annual session of an NPT Preparatory Committee offers an excellent occasion to place the Treaty into perspective. The whole raison d'être of this review process is to focus on implementation of commitments relating to the treaty’s three pillars—nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Yet we should not let this focused review detract our attention from the many ways that the treaty has contributed to the wider cause of international peace and security.

It is significant indeed that 189 States adhere to this treaty—a larger number than any other international security treaty apart from the UN Charter itself. We often hear that the treaty still does not have universal membership and this does indeed remain in the treaty’s thick dossier of unfinished business. Yet its gradual progress toward universality has been one of the most remarkable features of the treaty’s evolution in establishing global norms.

What is most needed now in NPT arenas is to revive a sense of forward progress—however slow, however difficult it may be. In this sense, former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld’s views about disarmament remain quite relevant today. “In this field”—he once said—“a standstill does not exist; if you do not go forward, you do go backward.”1

If the NPT review process had a motto, I cannot think of a better candidate than these very words. This process does not exist simply to reaffirm the status quo. It is not an empty ritual—and must not be permitted to become one. Instead, it is some sense both a diagnostic instrument for assessing the general health of the treaty as seen in the practices and policies of States, as well as a means for making prescriptions—actions needed to improve the general health of the treaty regime.

Certainly the “thirteen steps” on nuclear disarmament adopted at the 2000 NPT Review Conference and the 64-Point Action Plan were both forward-looking in orientation. Each of these prescriptions has the potential to make its own contributions to strengthening the treaty regime, and thereby to contribute to international peace and security.

The prospects for achieving universal support for these prescriptions, however, are very much a function of their fairness to all the States Parties. There is already some built-in tension in the treaty between the different obligations of the nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States. Yet the legitimacy the treaty regime can still be sustained, provided that the forward movement cited by Hammarskjöld is in fact taking place in terms of all the treaty’s provisions, especially nuclear disarmament.

It is reassuring that the nuclear-weapon States have been meeting together to discuss implementation of their commitments under Article VI of the Treaty and the disarmament provisions of the 2010 Action Plan—and they met again last week. These P5 meetings provide a forum for developing common positions on such issues as verification and transparency, which have long been recognized as needed in multilateral disarmament. The

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closer we get to the opening of the next Review Conference, the more important those meetings will become, as international expectations continue to grow for forward progress.

One area that will get increased scrutiny in the years ahead will be the readiness of the nuclear-weapon States to increase the detail of their reporting on their nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation activities. In response to an invitation extended at the 2010 NPT Review Conference, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has created a place-keeper page on its web site to serve as a future repository of data voluntarily submitted by the nuclear-weapon States on their disarmament activities. We hope the nuclear-weapon States will recognize the merit of using this database for documenting progress in this field.

I view it as a positive sign that individuals and groups in civil society are recognizing the importance of accountability in implementing past commitments to progress in disarmament and non-proliferation. The Office for Disarmament Affairs has now counted about a half dozen different “report cards” that assess State behaviour relative to these commitments. While such assessments cannot replace the NPT review process, they can contribute to strengthening the wider process of accountability, by pointing to progress where it occurs, as well as to setbacks or departures from agreed commitments.

Of course, the Treaty is facing many challenges well outside the domain of Article VI.

We all know that—despite a decision made at the 2010 NPT Review Conference—it was not possible to convene an international conference in 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Yet we also know that enormous support remains among States Parties to convene such a conference, that efforts to convene it will persist, and that progress in moving this initiative forward will also contribute to both regional and international peace and security. I know this will be a high-priority subject at this session of the Preparatory Committee and I hope this conference can be held later this year at the soonest.

We have all also witnessed in recent months a deterioration of the security situation on the Korean peninsula, which has featured threats from the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea to resume missile tests and even to use nuclear weapons.

We see signs of an arms race in South Asia involving fissile material production, and the competitive development of both nuclear-capable missiles and nuclear weapons.

We see that sustained diplomatic efforts to encourage Iran to fulfil its responsibilities under Security Council resolutions have so far failed to yield a resolution of ongoing concerns over certain of its nuclear activities.

My hope is that your deliberations will help to create a climate that will be conducive to the full implementation of all commitments made under the treaty. This will help in addressing challenges from these specific cases, because it would signal a resolve to move away from nuclear weapons and to de-legitimize not just their use but their very existence. In this sense, disarmament and non-proliferation are not alternatives, and they are also not to be pursued sequentially. They are mutually reinforcing parts of this treaty. And the review process monitors their implementation, before the eyes of world public opinion.

For all these reasons, I wish you a very productive session.