General Debate

Statement by

Ambassador Michael Gaffey,
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations and other International Organisations in Geneva

At the
2018 Preparatory Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

Geneva, 24 April, 2018

Check against Delivery
Mr. Chairman

Ireland aligns with the statements by the European Union, by the New Agenda Coalition and by the Vienna Group of Ten.

May I congratulate you on your chairmanship and thank you for the effective and inclusive preparatory consultations you have undertaken, building on the work of your predecessor.

We also welcome the strong representation from Civil Society in our discussions.

Mr Chairman,

In 1958, when Ireland’s Foreign Minister, Frank Aiken, introduced the first of the Irish resolutions at the UN which would eventually lead to the adoption of the NPT, the prospect of a world where many actors would eventually acquire the means to build their own nuclear arsenals was very real. Aiken stated that “Weapons, which are the monopoly of the great powers today, become the weapons of smaller powers and revolutionary groups tomorrow”.
As the NPT reaches 50, we can agree that it has achieved many of its objectives. Very few States have remained outside the Treaty and gone on to develop Nuclear Weapons. The Five Nuclear Weapons States have all joined it and are bound by the commitment in Article VI to nuclear disarmament. This remains the core legal obligation to disarm, a commitment reiterated by the undertaking given in 2000 to accomplish the total abolition of their nuclear weapons.

The States of many regions have chosen to be part of Nuclear Weapons Free Zones. And last July, almost two thirds of the UN membership voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The NPT itself is a slim Treaty, but the international community has built around it a strong framework of supporting institutions. The IAEA, in particular, has built up an impressive structure of expertise and an enabling framework to facilitate the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Likewise, the CTBTO has strengthened and enhanced the norm against nuclear testing.

With the development of supporting export control regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control
Regime, States have been successfully assisted in preventing and inhibiting proliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology without preventing transfers of technology and materials for peaceful uses.

This is an essential aspect of the Treaty, and needs careful support. Ireland has been pleased to co-chair, with Iceland, the missile technology control regime this year.

The NPT has helped to promote many far-reaching agreements and understandings aimed at preventing further proliferation and enabling bilateral nuclear disarmament, including the reductions achieved through the INF, START and NEW START treaties.

We see the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as another success story for the NPT. It is the first new legal instrument on nuclear disarmament to be adopted in over 20 years. Its significance lies in its ground-breaking content and the progress it represents towards the fulfilment of the NPT’s Disarmament provisions. Article VI of the NPT expressly envisaged a separate and complementary “treaty on general and complete disarmament under
strict and effective international control.” We look forward to the Treaty’s early entry into force.

Mr Chairman,

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran negotiated in 2015 with great effort and attention, is under threat.

Meanwhile, Nuclear Disarmament by the NPT Nuclear Weapons States has stalled. After the successful outcome of the 2010 Review Conference and far-reaching Action Plan, the 2015 Review Conference did not agree an outcome. The CTBT has not entered into force and nuclear testing by DPRK has challenged and undermined the global norm against nuclear testing. Efforts to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in military doctrines and in nuclear alliances have receded. Proliferation threats are increasing.

The norm against the threat of use of nuclear weapons has been seriously eroded – and consideration seems to be given even to the use of nuclear weapons other than as a deterrent.
It is surely more urgent than ever that the NPT States Parties renew our efforts to overcome the divisions on nuclear disarmament.

The statement on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition has set out the steps we have all agreed and signed up to. Ireland is anxious now that we make progress, within the NPT, on these issues. We look to the Nuclear Weapons States, with two years left in this Review Cycle. With increasing international tensions, and heightened risk of an actual nuclear weapons detonation with the catastrophic humanitarian consequences so clearly set out in the humanitarian initiative, we would particularly welcome work on risk reduction such as de-alerting, as a matter of urgency. We would also encourage the US and the Russian Federation to reengage on a successor agreement to New Start.

It is also urgent to address the question of The Middle East Zone free of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and time for a stocktaking and reassessment of how we can achieve some progress, building trust and confidence through dialogue. Ireland will host a side event on the Zone, with BASIC, on 1 May.
There are already some green shoots in the Chairman’s draft summary of last year’s preparatory meeting, including the recognition of gendered impacts of nuclear weapons and the need to increase women’s participation in nuclear disarmament fora. This evening, Ireland will launch our new Working Paper: Impact and Empowerment- the Role of gender in the NPT.

This is part of our project: “Nuclear Disarmament, the Missing Link in Multilateralism”. It aims to more effectively connect nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to the international community’s other high level goals, notably in the framework of the SDGs.

Mr Chairman

Ireland continues to believe that a nuclear weapon free world is possible.

Speaking on the twentieth anniversary of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace to Northern Ireland, Ireland’s Deputy Prime Minister, Simon Coveney said “renewal does not demand perfection. It demands leadership, courage and hard work”. The NPT too requires leadership, courage and hard work. It is our common obligation to provide it at this Conference.
Thank you