Second session of the United Nations Conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination

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Madam Chair,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to address you at the outset of the second substantive session of the Conference. I am aware that you are all very keen to dive right into substantive discussions, so I do not intend to provide lengthy remarks today. I will rather limit myself to some general observations regarding the significance of this process, from the perspective of a newcomer to this field.

In accordance with resolution 71/258, these negotiations aim to achieve a clear legal prohibition of nuclear weapons. These talks are truly historic, as they represent the most significant negotiations in the area of nuclear disarmament. Nuclear disarmament has been the longest sought objective of the United Nations, dating back to the very first resolution adopted by the General Assembly, in January 1946.

We have seen some impressive gains since that time. Yet, it has been more than twenty years now since United Nations disarmament bodies have produced a multilateral legally binding instrument on nuclear weapons. The lack of progress in recent times is despite the growing urgency posed by the deteriorating international security landscape and by the new awareness of the devastating humanitarian consequences if nuclear weapons were ever to be used again. The heroic and tireless efforts by Hibakusha guide the international community to move towards a world without nuclear weapons.

The need for progress is clear. And yet there seem to be no near-term prospects for further reductions. Some countries are actively improving and modernizing their nuclear arsenals. Promising multilateral initiatives remain blocked.
Some even question whether in this environment of increasing security tension the further pursuit of nuclear disarmament should be pursued. But, it is important to recall that measures for disarmament have served historically as a means to ease international tensions and to prevent conflict. The international community has also long recognized that partial measures and systematic steps are needed to facilitate the elimination of nuclear weapons.

In this spirit, I hope that your negotiations result in an effective instrument that complements and strengthens existing instruments, especially the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones. In my view, it will also be critical that the outcome of your negotiations build a bridge to the future in order to facilitate the inclusive engagement which we will need in order to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

In order to accomplish these aims, I believe great care should be taken in finalizing an instrument that is legally sound, technically accurate and politically wise. If these aims can be accomplished, the outcome of your work can make an important contribution to the advancement of nuclear disarmament.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs is pleased to support the convening of this Conference mandated by the General Assembly, and will endeavour to do its best to assist your work. I wish you all the best for your proceedings in the next three weeks.

Thank you very much.