Annual NATO Conference on WMD Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

Panel 1: The state of play and future of the multilateral non-proliferation regime and initiatives

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Helsinki, Finland

29 May, 2017
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Distinguished Delegates, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset I want to thank the Alliance and the Government of Finland for the opportunity to speak today. I’ve only been in the position of High Representative for a few weeks, but I am well aware of the enduring friendship between the Office for Disarmament Affairs and Alliance members, and the role you have played in advancing our shared goal of a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

Three recent examples spring immediately to mind: Spain’s deft shepherding of the 2016 review of UN Security Council resolution 1540; Canada’s leadership in establishing the Expert Preparatory Group on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty; and the Netherlands – especially my fellow panellist Hank Cor van der Kwast – with their expert stewardship of the recent Preparatory Committee meeting of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

This conference offers another opportunity to reaffirm that historic NATO position. In today’s global environment, dialogues between partners such as these are vital to making sure that, when it comes to the elimination and non-proliferation of WMD, we are all on the same page. When it comes to the continued health of the multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation regime, this is especially important.

With a few notable exceptions, the multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament regime has been buffeted by strong headwinds in recent years. The two decade stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament. The repeated use of chemical weapons in the Middle East. The financial precariousness of important disarmament regimes. The dangerous and provocative nuclear and missile tests by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. And perhaps most glaringly, the potential erosion of consensus over the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Each of these has – and continues to – place pressure on the multilateral regime and its ability to support our collective security.

Each of these is both the product of and exacerbated by the deteriorating international security climate. We are drifting backward into Cold War era positions without the necessary stabilisation and risk-management/reduction mechanisms, and coupled with an array of new and highly dangerous challenges, ranging from the global reach of vicious non-state actors to new technologies that have the potential to cause mass disruption, if not destruction.

Ladies and gentlemen

In such an environment, we need to reinforce the multilateral system so that it is nimble and adaptive enough to deal with enduring problems and to grapple with emerging challenges. We need to undergird the regime so that it is robust enough to withstand political turbulence.
I’d like to take this opportunity to outline five points through which I think we can achieve this.

**First of all**, let’s go back to the basic principles. We must remember that the reason why we pursue disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control agreements is because they enhance all of our security. At the height of the Cold War it was the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty that helped to bring security and stability to this continent. These instruments also provided an avenue for dialogue on issues of common ground. This is something we need to get back to. The purpose of disarmament is to enhance everyone’s security.

**Secondly**, States need to redouble their support for the UN disarmament machinery and the international disarmament and non-proliferation instruments. Let me give you three concrete examples:

- **One**: After a long period of inaction, slivers of light are beginning to emerge. In March, following nearly two decades of stalemate, the UN Disarmament Commission was able to reach consensus agreement on substantive recommendations. This is not an insubstantial outcome, it shows that states recognise the need for movement and it demonstrates a genuine willingness to compromise. Many countries stressed the importance of always sparing no effort to achieve consensus in disarmament, particularly after GA Resolution (Res 71/258) on the negotiation for a Nuclear Weapons Prohibition Treaty. I hope Member States will be able to build on the recent consensus agreement in the Disarmament Commission and find ways to break the stalemate in other areas of disarmament issues.

- **Two**: The international disarmament and non-proliferation regime is comprised of an impressive array of treaties and instruments, including UN Security Council resolutions. The well-functioning of each of these instruments matters greatly to the maintenance of the overall credibility of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. In order to be fully effective, they must also be universally and completely implemented. And they should be fully funded.

- **Three**: The impartiality of our dedicated technical agencies should be forcefully reiterated and supported. If these agencies are to remain effective their technical and professional nature must be respected and protected. As Secretary-General Guterres said, ours is a complex world and I firmly believe that in complex times we must be able to rely on the advice of scientific and technical professionals.

Ladies and gentlemen

**My third** point relates to the diverging positions on how to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. I appreciate that many States hold differing views on this issue, but the negotiations on a Convention on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons are a historic development as the
first multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament in twenty years. As such, I hope States can make this a step forward towards comprehensive nuclear disarmament.

If we are to return to common ground in our quest for a world free of nuclear weapons, the nuclear-weapon States must show the way. In fact, they have taken the commitment to do so under the NPT. Russia and the United States, as holders of the two largest nuclear arsenals, have a special responsibility. They need to find a way back to dialogue on further bilateral reductions, involving all types of nuclear weapons. I hope that Alliance members will encourage both States to follow this path.

Of course, it should also be stressed that there is no one path to the elimination of nuclear weapons. We should continue to exert all efforts to bring about other measures to achieve and maintain a nuclear-weapon-free world. These include negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and bring the long overdue Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty into force.

Finally, the NPT must remain the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and an essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. It represents near universal common ground and continues to buttress our collective security. I am pleased to see the draft Prohibition Convention explicitly recognises these facts.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the NPT’s entry into force, 2020 will be an important milestone. I urge all NATO states to redouble their traditional support for the NPT to overcome challenges, find common solutions and ensure a successful Review Conference for this vital multilateral initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen

My fourth point relates to chemical and biological weapons. Since 2013, the multilateral regime against chemical weapons has been repeatedly breached by the brazen and shocking use of these inhumane weapons. This violation of an international taboo cannot be allowed to become the new normal. The perpetrators of these horrific acts must be identified and held accountable.

NATO has consistently proven itself a leader in this field and I hope Alliance members will continue their strong support for the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mission and the OPCW Fact Finding Mission. Both need to be given the space to do their jobs in a professional and impartial manner.

I would like to stress that we cannot afford for the use of chemical weapons to set a precedent for the use of weapons of mass destruction, including by non-state actors.

In this context, efforts are underway, at the United Nations, to ensure that the Secretary-General’s mandated independent capacity to investigate allegations of the use of chemical and biological or toxin weapons through the Secretary-General’s Mechanism is fully
operational. This capacity is especially important given the lack of any other standing international agency with a capacity to investigate biological attacks. UNODA has facilitated specialized training, including the implementation of lessons learnt from the 2013 Syria investigation in order to ensure that experts on the roster are able to operate efficiently as a team under challenging field conditions. Continuous training is vital and this will require the support of all UN Member States, and many Alliance Members have already demonstrated their commitment in this regard.

Finally, my fifth point: the threat is being exacerbated by the technological revolution I mentioned earlier. This revolution is affecting the multilateral regime in two ways. One, we are seeing the emergence of advanced conventional weapons – from hypersonic missiles to lethal autonomous weapons systems – that have the potential to provoke new arms races and further destabilise the international system. I am deeply concerned that this trend in weapons development, combined with deteriorating international geopolitical relations, will lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons or encourage others to acquire them as asymmetric countermeasures.

Two, advanced commercial technology could, if left unchecked, create new avenues for proliferation. Technologies such as 3D printing and synthetic biology will make it far cheaper and far easier for a range of actors to acquire WMD.

NATO has already demonstrated willingness to grapple with emerging challenges through its leadership on cyber security. I ask that you take the same approach to the growing number of emerging technological threats.

The international community cannot afford to fall further behind these rapid advances. These issues impact every State’s security. I am convinced, therefore, that the United Nations remains the best venue in which to have inclusive multilateral discussions.

Ladies and gentlemen

The multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control regime is a durable mix of treaties and institutions. However, it does require constant tending to ensure that it is fit for purpose in this complex world. This means both adapting to new challenges but also adequately resourcing and supporting existing elements. It also means protecting different roles and characters of institutions and treaties, and understanding the complex impact of each of them to the overall credibility and effectiveness of the regime.

In closing, I would like to point out the intricate relationship between disarmament and political solutions of conflicts. Disarmament cannot take place in a vacuum of political will for a broader solution, but likewise, a broader political solution for any conflict cannot be found without process of identifying security frameworks, within which disarmament plays an important part.
In all of this, I hope that Alliance members will continue to play their important role of contributing to the security of the international community at large, beyond the security of the immediate alliance members. The United Nations would like to work with you in that endeavour.

Thank you.