Keynote Speech by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

Workshop on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
The 2019 NPT PrepCom: What Can Be Done in Advance of 2020?

hosted by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies
Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Annecy
15 March 2019
Dr Potter,

Distinguished Guests,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I want to begin by thanking Dr. Potter and the team at James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies [CNS] for once again hosting this workshop. “Annecy” is firmly embedded as one of the critical way stations throughout the NPT review cycle. It helps to facilitate the open and frank dialogue that, as both the Secretary-General and I have consistently said, is the only way to overcome differences and find common ground.

On the road to 2020 and the NPT Review Conference that kind of dialogue assumes even greater value.

Concern about the 2020 Review Conference is increasing. We hear forecasts for stormy weather from every corner of the commentariat. I, for one, do not believe that the failure to achieve consensus on an outcome document in 2020 necessarily signals the demise of the Treaty. But it would set a dismal precedent – we have never had two such Review Conferences consecutively – and it would cast a spotlight on potential cracks in the NPT, while raising questions about States parties’ willingness to make compromises and seek collective, rather than narrow and short-term, security benefits.

I am, however, taking a more positive approach to the current Review cycle. I see 2020 as a symbolic opportunity to make practical gains in strengthening the Treaty.

After all, States parties do not hold Review Conferences for the purpose of listening to one hundred and ninety national statements. They do so because they recognize the tangible global security benefits the Treaty provides and the need to ensure it continues to do so.

Having said that, we are running out of time between now and 2020. The ground needs to be prepared if we are to make those practical gains, starting with the Preparatory Committee session next month.

In this context, I take this opportunity to reaffirm to the new Chair the continued support and commitment of the Office of Disarmament Affairs to helping him produce a successful conclusion to the session.
With just over a year to go, we also need to start thinking about the Review Conference and what success or failure looks like in 2020, and what the broader ramifications for the disarmament and non-proliferation regime might be.

It is clear from the first two Preparatory Committee sessions that there are some serious divisions that need to be overcome in the next year. These are amongst nuclear-weapon States (NWS), between NWS and non-nuclear weapon States, and amongst NNWS. They are the result of factors external and internal to the Treaty.

I think we can all acknowledge that the world is a very different place than it was in 2015. A deteriorating international environment. Increased emphasis on the role of nuclear weapons in strategic policies. Decreased barriers between nuclear and conventional doctrines. The use of nuclear warfighting rhetoric and what amounts to a qualitative nuclear arms race. The combination of these factors has increased the likelihood of a nuclear detonation – either intentionally, by accident or through miscalculation – to heights not seen since the darkest days of the Cold War.

First and foremost, therefore, the top priority for all States parties should be to reinforce the norm against the use of nuclear weapons. A simple reaffirmation of the maxim espoused by President Reagan and General-Secretary Gorbachev that a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought would get to the heart of the NPT’s purpose and set the right tone for the Review Conference.

Secondly, and as I’m the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs you’ll understand why I’m focused on this, a successful outcome in 2020 requires forward movement on the implementation of Article VI, including through the implementation of commitments made at previous Review Conferences and especially the unequivocal undertaking to eliminate nuclear weapons.

Past commitments cannot be arbitrarily abrogated or else they become no more valuable than the paper on which they are written. The absence of implementation undermines potential future gains across all three of the Treaty’s pillars. In today’s environment, the immediate and full implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures outlined in previous outcomes would be a particularly positive step.
In this vein, I welcome the ongoing P5 process, including the recent meeting in Beijing, and I hope that it will lead to practical and forward-looking ideas for the Review Conference. I am also encouraged by the continued commitment by the NWS to the goals of Article VI.

As I noted, we all agree the international environment is becoming increasingly unstable. However, as the Secretary-General made clear in his agenda: disarmament and arms control are important mechanisms that help make the world safer and more secure. They are measures to help prevent, mitigate and resolve conflict, and can be pursued in tandem with other peace-building and security processes.

In fact, I would argue that the current environment necessitates the urgent pursuit of measures to reduce the growing risk of a nuclear detonation.

The concept of ‘risk reduction’ is a broad one, especially given the multipolar nature of the nuclear order and the new risks posed by emerging game-changing technologies.

States parties have an opportunity between now and 2020 to devise a set of common risk reduction measures that the Review Conference could endorse. Such measures should be both practical and contribute to the overarching goal of the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Preparatory Committee session could begin this conversation.

I also strongly encourage the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START Treaty before the Review Conference. In addition to the practical security benefit the extension would bring to the two countries, doing so would be a forceful demonstration of both sides’ commitment to Article VI and the broader NPT regime, and of the responsibility and leadership of the two nuclear super powers.

Commitment to the norm against nuclear weapon use, demonstrated implementation of existing commitments and a package of risk reduction measures seems to me to be a good start on which to achieve success in relation to pillar one of the Treaty.

There is one other measure that could help secure success in 2020 and beyond – the establishment of a modus vivendi between supporters and opponents of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in the NPT context.

I think an outcome similar to last year’s Preparatory Committee session seems appropriate. The level of support should be reflected in any outcome document but so too should any objections, including those related to customary international law.
Moving to non-proliferation, or pillar two, it should be reiterated that the current security environment could also increase proliferation pressures, particularly in regional crisis zones. New technologies such as additive manufacturing coupled with unregulated use of cyberspace – the ‘dark web’ – could exponentially lower the barriers to proliferation. The proliferation of ballistic missile technology combined with growing interest in the full fuel cycle by States in turbulent regions is also worrying.

The non-proliferation regime and especially its safeguards system must be able to meet the challenges of this century. That includes through the universal adoption of the voluntary Additional Protocol but also through further examination of how safeguards can be enhanced to deal with emerging challenges. The International Atomic Energy Agency as the steward of this system needs to be appropriately resourced and language in the Review Conference outcomes should reflect support for this and for the strongest possible safeguards.

One of the mantras that I will continue to repeat is that disarmament and non-proliferation are two sides of the same coin – backward movement on one begets backward movement on the other. Non-proliferation seeds the ground for further disarmament measures. Non-compliance with non-proliferation obligations undermines mutual trust, as well as the cause of a world free of nuclear weapons.

A deficit of trust is one of the single biggest obstacles to progress in this field. As I’ve already stated, the only way to build trust is through dialogue, but in parallel, compliance should also be assured through verification. There is excellent ongoing work in this field and I hope that the findings of efforts such as the Group of Governmental Experts and the International Partnership will permeate the NPT process, helping States parties to drive this issue forward.

On the issue of the Middle East, it will be important for the conference mandated by the General Assembly, and to be held in 2019, to build confidence in that process and for it to make a positive impact on the 2020 Review Conference.

2020 marks not only the fiftieth anniversary of the NPT’s entry into force, but also twenty-five years since the Treaty was indefinitely extended and the package of resolutions that gave us the focus and format we have today.
It is appropriate that after twenty-five years, questions are being asked about the review process itself: what success should look like and even whether the NPT’s post-1995 incarnation – or NPT 2.0 as I have heard it called – remains fit for purpose.

Should States parties aim for a consensus outcome document? Is this wishful thinking in the current context? I believe that, yes, they should continue to strive for consensus, but they should also be open to exploring alternative approaches, which could include a number of products in the form of outcome documents, resolutions or decisions. What such approaches could look like might be a useful discussion for the PrepCom to undertake.

The NPT has been a remarkably successful treaty and a linchpin of international security. We cannot take that success for granted. Recent events have shown that instruments considered bedrock of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime can be washed away.

Beyond what I’ve highlighted today, this is my message to States parties: Be mindful of the collective benefits the NPT provides. Start work now, using the forthcoming Preparatory Committee session to seed the ground for a successful outcome in 2020; and strive to engage with each other in civil, sincere, and constructive dialogue to bring this conclusion about.

Thank you.