Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: Third Preparatory Committee Session of the 2020 Review Cycle

Side event “When participation becomes meaningful: advancing the conversation on gender diversity in the NPT”

Ms Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

New York
3 May 2019
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the organizers – Australia, Canada, Ireland, Namibia, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research – for convening this important and timely event. It is a pleasure to be here and I look forward to what I know will be a fruitful discussion on gender diversity in the NPT.

As both High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and an International Gender Champion, I have pledged to raise global awareness about the gendered impact of weapons and to promote the full and equal participation of women in the field of disarmament. I made this pledge because gender equality is not only a moral imperative and fundamental human right, but also a powerful tool for accelerating progress in all areas of the UN’s work, including peace and security. Strengthening the role of women and diversity of voices in disarmament will advance our collective goals in disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control. As has been said many times before, but bears repeating: Taking gender into account will have positive benefits for women, but of equal importance, a gender sensitive approach to disarmament will have positive impacts on the field as a whole.

In the field of disarmament, women have been particularly powerful agents for peace and progress. Yet, as we all well know, women continue to remain underrepresented at intergovernmental discussions and negotiations on disarmament. At any given international meeting of governments on disarmament, only one in four delegates are women. Among heads of delegations, this figure is even worse. For example, at the first session of this NPT PrepCom in 2017, there were 22 women heads of delegation, or 18% of all delegation leaders. At the second session in 2018, this number improved only slightly to 23 women
heads of delegations, or 20% of all delegation leaders. At both sessions, close to 30% of all delegations were exclusively male. We urgently need to address these disparities, especially if we are to ensure that the NPT is fit for purpose in the changing context of the today’s international security environment.

As you know, the Secretary-General has committed himself under Action 37 of his Disarmament Agenda to work to achieve gender parity on all panels, boards, expert groups and other bodies established under his auspices in the field of disarmament. We have subsequently revised the way in which the Groups of Governmental Experts (GGEs) are established. The new procedure is more transparent for all member states, and easier for the Secretary-General to take into account in the selection process the groups’ gender balance, in addition to the very important consideration of geographical balance. I am pleased to inform you that the most recent GGE on cybersecurity has 11 women out of 25 members, which almost doubled female representation compared to the previous GGE on cybersecurity and constitutes a more than 100% increase in comparison to the prevailing average across GGEs on all topics.

As you all know, the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control regime is currently facing increasingly complex challenges, including deteriorating trust, unprecedented military spending, development of new nuclear capabilities, disregard for the norm that a nuclear war can never be won, and the emergence of multiple revolutionary technologies that are creating destabilizing arms racing dynamics. Together, these developments have created an international security environment in which the risk of nuclear weapon use, intentionally, accidentally, or through miscalculation, is higher than it has been in decades.
As Secretary-General Guterres has said: this challenging security environment demands a new vision for arms control. Such a vision must incorporate new and diverse voices. Now more than ever, problems as grave and difficult as nuclear weapons require the mobilization of all our human capital, with full engagement by both men and women. We cannot afford to use only half of our intellect, creativity and energy to address these complex challenges. With women’s proven potential to upend the status quo, their continued marginalization in negotiations related to nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, including the NPT, is a loss for the entire world. Involving more women can revitalize these talks and advance our collective effort to create a safer and more secure future.

ODA is committed to doing our part to ensure the full and equal participation of women in the field of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. I know all of you here today are equally committed, and I look forward to hearing the recommendations that arise from today’s presentations and discussion.

Thank you.