Opening Remarks at James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) and Mission of Malaysia NPT Diplomatic Workshop

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

New York
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Ambassador Hussin,

Ms. Mukhatzhanova,

Distinguished delegates,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the kind invitation. As always, I want to thank Dr. Potter and CNS, not only for these practical and increasingly vital efforts to bring States parties together in the cause of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, but also for their continued support and partnership to the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

We are faced with a dual dilemma when it comes to the NPT. Not only is time running short – we have some seven months remaining until the Review Conference – but there also little evidence that positions are converging. The goings on in the First Committee are testament to the fact that, indeed, quite the opposite is occurring.

Common ground is in short supply at precisely the time when we need it most. A combination of deteriorating relationships between NWS, dangerous rhetoric about the utility of nuclear weapons, modernization campaigns that are, in effect, a qualitative arms race and regional conflicts with nuclear dimensions have created a dangerous context in which the possible use of a nuclear weapons is all together greater than it has been since the darkest days of the Cold War.

Now is, therefore, an opportune time to remind States parties that the NPT is common ground. From the core supporters of the TPNW to NWS and their allies alike, the NPT is recognized as an intrinsic element of our collective security and an instrument from which all States parties continue to derive significant value.

In the face of a troubling international environment, ensuring that the security and other benefits provided by the Treaty remain intact should be every States parties’ number one priority.
Clearly there are multiple issues that could derail the Review Conference – from the divisions over the pace and scale of disarmament, to tensions between nuclear-weapon States, to proliferation crises and, of course, the Middle East Zone.

I do not believe these divisions are insurmountable. However, they could prove to be if States parties do not immediately address three fundamental issues.

First, is the need for committed leadership by the NWS.

Second, is the need for interlocutors to step forward who can engage with the different sides of current divisions.

Third, is the need for States parties to think strategically about what success looks like in 2020 and how to get there. Heading into April 2020, States parties will need common understandings about what could constitute an outcome from the Review Conference.

As I have consistently said: the 2020 Review Conference – the fiftieth anniversary of the NPT’s entry into force – presents both a symbolic and practical opportunity for States parties. It is an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the Treaty and a world free of nuclear weapons; to demonstrate the implementation of all obligations undertaken to attain this goal; to strengthen non-proliferation measures against evolving challenges; and, also to return the world to a path that reduces nuclear dangers through practical steps in disarmament.

To all participants today, it is my sincere hope that you will use this workshop to think creatively to ensure the NPT retains its role as a load-bearing pillar of collective security and that it remains fit for purpose through 2020 and beyond.

Thank you.