Opening Remarks at the ICAN/Mission of Bolivia Workshop to promote the early entry-into-force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

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New York
18 October 2019
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by thanking the Permanent Missions of Bolivia, Austria, Kazakhstan and New Zealand, as well the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), for the opportunity to speak at this workshop.

Only a few weeks ago, I spoke about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) at its annual signature and ratification ceremony that is part of the Treaty Event on the margins of the General Debate. At the end of the General Debate, the Legal Counsel of the United Nations distributed the numbers of all treaty actions undertaken at this year’s Treaty Event, and TPNW signatures and ratifications accounted for more than one quarter of that total. This is a testament to the importance that many States attach to this treaty.

Establishing why States attach such importance to the TPNW comes as no surprise: since it was opened for signature in 2017, little meaningful progress has been made towards our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. Elements of the arms control regime are collapsing, with the fate of others hanging in the balance. What is effectively a qualitative arms race between the possessors of the world’s nuclear arsenals continues unabated. This is coupled with dangerous rhetoric about the utility of nuclear weapons and the possibility of fighting and even winning a nuclear war – concepts that should have been consigned to the dustbin of history along with the Cold War.

At the same time, the world has shifted to a multipolar nuclear order, with nuclear dyads and triads that are linked to regional flashpoints that could escalate to include other nuclear-armed States. Revolutionary technologies could expose dangerous and new vulnerabilities, further enhancing the possibility that a nuclear weapon could be used.

In short, nuclear danger has increased and the goals of the TPNW, therefore, become much more important today.

There is a dire need for dedicated efforts in pursuit of nuclear disarmament that will take us forward on the path to the total elimination of nuclear weapons. I, therefore, take this opportunity to applaud you for your commitment to this goal.
I can assure you that the Office for Disarmament Affairs takes its role under the Treaty very seriously. The United Nations Secretariat will be ready to carry out the functions specifically assigned to it under the TPNW when it enters into force.

Together with the “core group” of States, civil society has played a key role both during its negotiation and now, in the campaign to facilitate its entry into force. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the ICAN is testament to that role. In his Disarmament Agenda, the Secretary-General recognized that civil society engagement can impact positively on United Nations disarmament priorities. We will therefore continue to strengthen our cooperation with civil society and look forward to working with you in this regard.

By working together in a spirit of complementarity rather than competition, we can make this world a safer and more secure place for all.

I thank you.