High Representative Stresses Need for Common Ground in Shaping Sustainable Security Paradigm, as Disarmament Commission Opens 2017 Session

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Delegates Differ over Talks on Legally Binding Treaty to Ban Nuclear Weapons

Shaping a new sustainable security paradigm would hinge on finding common ground on modernizing the concept of general and complete disarmament for the twenty-first century, the Disarmament Commission heard today.

The panel’s mission was more valid now than ever before, said Kim Won-soo, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, as the Commission opened its 2017 session.  “There are high expectations for progress in 2017, including from this body,” he continued, citing ongoing negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, and the start of the 2020 review cycle relating to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.  “We have good opportunities for action on numerous fronts in a busy disarmament agenda,” he noted.  “Success in your deliberations at this Commission can set a positive tone and provide new impetus for achieving progress on our collective efforts to strengthen disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.”

He went on to emphasize that “we need to work harder to reverse those trends” amid rising global and regional tensions, arms competition in strategic and conventional weaponry, worrying policy trends, and a dearth of outcomes from disarmament institutions.  Cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and hypersonic missiles were among a range of concerns from which had arisen a double-blurring of the line between strategic and non-strategic weapons, and between nuclear and conventional arms, he said.  The present session was an opportunity to revitalize the concept of general and complete disarmament for the twenty-first century, he said, describing the Commission as the only universal deliberative body in that regard.

Commission Chair Gabriela Martinic (Argentina) said two working groups would focus, throughout the three-week session, on recommendations concerning nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons, with a view to sending them to the General Assembly.  Hopefully, Member States would engage constructively in advancing discussions.

With the Commission having adopted its agenda and begun its general debate, many speakers underlined that political will and flexibility must guide the discussions to fruition and advance progress.  Others called for the Commission to break the current deadlock that had left an array of disarmament processes hamstrung by the inability to find consensus on issues and threats requiring urgent attention.  Several offered examples of efforts to combat the illicit weapons trade, and to promote transparency and confidence-building measures in preventing an arms race in outer space.  Some speakers mentioned the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination, held in March and due to continue in July, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 71/258, adopted in December 2016.

Yet, divergent views emerged on a range of issues, including the question of whether consensus was necessary for progress.  The representative of the United States said both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States had opposed the negotiations in that conference.  Any treaty emerging from it would come with an enormous cost, without achieving the elimination of a single warhead, and with the risk of deepening the divide.  As such, the United States would not participate in the negotiations, he said, emphasizing the need for a culture of consensus.

The Russian Federation’s representative said the Commission’s work had been stymied by the same problems plaguing other elements of the disarmament machinery — the inability, and sometimes the banal lack of will, to allow reasonable compromises for the sake of reaching consensus.  “Delivering humanity from the nuclear threat is extremely complex and multifaceted,” he stressed.  “It has no simple solutions.  It would be a big mistake to assume that the problem of eliminating nuclear weapons could be sorted out by a simple vote for their blanket ban.”

Expressing a different perspective, some speakers pledged their active involvement in the conference, with Cuba’s representative saying that a convention banning nuclear weapons was a step in the right direction.  Cameroon’s representative pointed out, on behalf of the African Group, that nuclear arms were the only weapons of mass destruction that were not prohibited.  It was essential to free the world of all nuclear arms, he said, highlighting the impact of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, known as the Treaty of Pelindaba.  A similar zone should also be created in the Middle East, he added, voicing a common view.

Indeed, Qatar’s representative stressed, on behalf of the Arab Group, the importance of a multilateral process to negotiate such a zone.  Meanwhile, Israel’s representative said a nuclear-weapon-free zone could be established only by all countries of the region, and not through a multilateral path.

Indonesia representative, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, emphasized that proliferation concerns were best addressed through multilaterally negotiated, universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory agreements that should be transparent and open to participation by all States.  Nuclear disarmament should not be conditional on confidence-building measures, non-proliferation efforts or so-called strategic stability, he said, emphasizing rather the importance of humanitarian considerations in all deliberations on nuclear weapons.

Other speakers supported that view, with El Salvador’s representative saying, on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, that the use of nuclear weapons would constitute a crime against humanity and a violation of international law.  It was in the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States to receive guarantees from those in possession of such arms that they would not use, or threaten to use them.

Concerns were also shared about negative disarmament and non-proliferation trends.  Pakistan’s representative said they were fuelled by lack of progress on the part of nuclear-weapon States in fulfilling their legal disarmament obligations, and exacerbated by recent vows by some of them to greatly strengthen and expand their nuclear capabilities.  Pakistan had been left with no option but to follow suit by introducing nuclear weapons in order to restore strategic stability and deter all forms of aggression, she said.  “Our conduct continues to be defined by restraint and responsibility, and avoidance of an arms race.”

Several speakers emphasized that the only path to progress on those and other issues rested on a foundation of constructive dialogue.  Kazakhstan’s representative said that in light of the paralysis and divisions within multilateral disarmament bodies, it was no wonder that many delegations sought progress outside traditional United Nations forums.  However, the Commission had considerable potential to demonstrate that the existing disarmament machinery could produce results.

Many speakers expressed their condolences to the Government and people of the Russian Federation for today’s bombing attack in Saint Petersburg.

In other business, the Commission elected the following Vice-Chairs:  Asha Challenger (Antigua and Barbuda), Anda Grinberga (Latvia), Rosita Šorytė (Lithuania), Yasar Ammar (Pakistan) and Hamza Alokly (Libya).  It also elected Ali Robatjazi (Iran) Rapporteur, as well as Wilmer Mendez (Venezuela) and Lachezara Stoeva (Bulgaria) as Chairs of Working Group I and Working Group II, respectively.

Comprising all United Nations Member States, the Disarmament Commission was created to consider and recommend action on various disarmament issues, usually taking up two substantive items each year.  The 2017 session will conclude on 21 April.

Also delivering statements today were representatives of the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Peru, Argentina, Ukraine, Sudan, Venezuela, Cyprus, Turkey, Spain, Algeria, Austria, Côte d’Ivoire, China, Libya, Australia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Bangladesh and India.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply were representatives of Iran, Syria, Israel, United States, Republic of Korea, Ukraine, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation.

The Disarmament Commission will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 4 April, to continue its work.

Opening Remarks

GABRIELA MARTINIC (Argentina), Chair of the Disarmament Commission, said that during the present session — the last phase of the three-year cycle — two working groups would focus on recommendations concerning the realization of nuclear disarmament and on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons.  Hopefully Member States would work constructively towards common ground, she added.

KIM WON-SOO, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, noted that 2017 marked the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Commission, emphasizing that its mission was more valid now than ever before.  At a time of rising global and regional tensions, arms competition in strategic and conventional weaponry, worrying policy trends and a dearth of outcomes from disarmament institutions, “we need to work harder to reverse those trends”.  Cybersecurity, artificial intelligence and hypersonic missiles were among a range of concerns from which had arisen a double-blurring of the line between strategic and non-strategic weapons, and between nuclear and conventional arms.  Addressing those trends would require a comprehensive approach, he said, adding that the goal had always been broader than merely eliminating or restricting certain categories of weapons.  Disarmament was intended to take an integrated approach to the larger problem of war and to facilitate arrangements for the collective maintenance of international security.  Creating a new paradigm for sustainable security required an examination of how to modernize the concept of general and complete disarmament for the twenty-first century, he said, describing the Commission’s current session as an opportunity to revitalize that approach by considering the two recommendations of the working groups.  As the only universal deliberative body, the Commission could make a meaningful contribution in revitalizing general and complete disarmament.

Turning to outer space issues, he said the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Transparency and Confidence-building Measures had successfully concluded its work in 2013, and the subsequent General Assembly resolution had been a rare display of unity on a strategic issue of such magnitude.  Realizing implementation of transparency and confidence-building measures would be an indispensable step towards preventing an arms race in outer space, he said, pointing out that the Secretary-General’s report on implementation efforts, issued in March, had identified gaps and should serve as a practical guide to the Commission’s informal discussions.  They in turn could help in exploring ideas to ensure that space remained free of conflict and unsustainable practices.  “There are high expectations for progress in 2017, including from this body,” he said, citing ongoing negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons and the start of the 2020 review cycle relating to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.  “We have good opportunities for action on numerous fronts in a busy disarmament agenda,” he noted.  “Success in your deliberations at this Commission can set a positive tone and provide new impetus for achieving progress on our collective efforts to strengthen disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation.”

Statements

DIAN TRIANSYAH DJANI (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, called on the nuclear-weapon States to eliminate their nuclear arsenals totally, in accordance with their Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations.  Nuclear disarmament should not be conditional on confidence-building measures, non-proliferation efforts or so-called strategic stability, he said, emphasizing rather the importance of humanitarian considerations in all deliberations on nuclear weapons.  The Non-Aligned Movement, he said, reaffirmed the urgent need for a universal, unconditional, non-discriminatory and legally binding instrument to effectively assure all non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances, pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

He went on to reaffirm the inalienable right of each State to develop, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and to participate in the exchange of related equipment, materials and information.  Emphasizing that proliferation concerns were best addressed through multilaterally negotiated, universal, comprehensive and non-discriminatory agreements that should be transparent and open to participation by all States, he called upon all parties concerned to take urgent and practical steps for the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East.  In the interim, he said, the Non-Aligned Movement demanded that Israel accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty without precondition or delay, place its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, and conduct its nuclear-related activities in conformity with the non-proliferation regime.

AHMED MOHAMED AL-THANI (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, said there could be no promotion of peace, security and stability as long as nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction threatened the world.  Ridding the Middle East of nuclear weapons was a collective responsibility to be borne by the international community, he said, detailing how Arab States, through a group of elders, had untaken a comprehensive review of various positions regarding a nuclear-weapon-free zone.  Emphasizing the need to redouble multilateral efforts towards the elimination of nuclear weapons, he said Arab States would continue to work tirelessly in all multilateral disarmament forums.

In signing up to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Arab States had submitted all their nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguard regimes, he said, pointing out that Israel had failed to do so.  Describing the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East as the fourth pillar of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, he said there had been no progress in that regard.  Commitments adopted voluntarily could help to build confidence among States, emphasizing also the importance of international instruments to prohibit illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

RUBÉN IGNACIO ZAMORA (El Salvador), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), recalled that the Community had declared the region a zone of peace during a summit in Havana.  CELAC was deeply concerned about the threat to humankind posed by the existence of nuclear weapons, the use of which would be a crime against humanity and a violation of international law, he said, calling for their total elimination by a clearly established deadline.  Welcoming the General Assembly’s adoption of resolution 71/258, he reiterated CELAC’s intention to participate actively in negotiations on a legally binding instrument prohibiting nuclear weapons.

It was in the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States to receive guarantees from those possessing such weapons that they would not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons, he continued.  Welcoming the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco), he asserted the commitment of CELAC member States to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and its three pillars, and to the inalienable right of States to the peaceful use of nuclear energy.  CELAC stressed the universality of that instrument, and urged States that had not yet done so to accede to it as non-nuclear-weapon States.  As for conventional weapons, he said confidence-building measures would contribute to greater stability and security, and invited States to extend such measures at all appropriate levels.

MICHEL TOMMO MONTHÉ (Cameroon), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said disarmament and non-proliferation issues were best addressed through multilateral, non-discriminatory processes.  Despite some challenges, the Commission had in the past advanced such discussions.  However, a lack of political will and flexibility had stymied efforts to agree on issues before it.  Nuclear arms were the only non-prohibited weapon of mass destruction, he said, condemning any instrument that justified their use or threat of use.  In fact, the humanitarian consequences of their use would be a violation of the United Nations Charter.  Welcoming the General Assembly resolution on taking forward multilateral negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, he said the 2017 negotiations represented a rare opportunity that would help to complement and strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.  The Group also recognized the right of all States to benefit from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Africa, he continued, remained committed to honouring its disarmament commitments and urged all States to do the same.  He regretted to note that the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons had failed to achieve its goal.  As a nuclear-weapon-free zone, African States would continue to honour its status, he said, stressing that the establishment of such zones reinforced disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.  He expressed dissatisfaction that such a zone had not yet been established in the Middle East and disappointment that the mandated conference in 2012 had not been held.  Turning to other concerns, he said the Conference on Disarmament must break the current deadlock.  On small arms and light weapons, he emphasized the need to tackle their illicit proliferation, which had ravaged communities across Africa, and to support the work of all United Nations regional disarmament centres.  The Commission must do its part and undertake meaningful dialogue during the session.

BARLYBAY SADYKOV (Kazakhstan) said that, given the paralysis and divisions within multilateral disarmament bodies, it was no wonder that many delegations looked outside traditional United Nations forums for progress.  That could be seen in the effort to craft a nuclear-weapons-ban treaty.  However, the Commission — as the only representative body of all Member States — had considerable potential to demonstrate that the existing disarmament machinery could produce results.  Underscoring the need to appreciate the dedication and passion of delegates, he said the best way forward would be to aim for constructive but modest outcomes.

MAOR ELBAZ-STARINSKY (Israel) expressed support for a vision of a Middle East free from wars, conflicts, weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means, but said arms control and disarmament processes were inseparable from the context in which they existed.  As the region had recently been further destabilized and radicalized, the erosion of State sovereignty had never been so apparent.  Amid terrorist attacks, chemical weapon use and Iran’s ballistic missile testing, regional arms control processes required all regional States to engage in an inclusive dialogue to create a new security paradigm.  Likewise, with regard to establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, all States in the region must arrive freely at arrangements to do so.  Israel recognized that the threat of the spread of small arms and light weapons could only be addressed through collaborative efforts, he said, expressing support for international instruments including the Arms Trade Treaty.

HAHN CHOONGHEE (Republic of Korea) said old threats were growing more entrenched and new challenges were emerging.  In 2016 alone, North Korea [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] staged two nuclear tests and launched 24 ballistic missiles, violating Security Council resolutions.  In 2017, it fired six ballistic missiles and tested a ballistic missile engine.  If not urgently addressed, the foundation of the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime would be irreparably shaken.  North Korea should abandon its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner.  During the first working group discussion on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, he urged nuclear “haves” and “have-nots” to make recommendations ahead of next month’s preparatory committee meeting for the 2020 Review Conference.  There needed to be a step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament which considered each country’s security environment, he said, stressing that progress should not be hindered during the second working group on confidence-building measures for conventional weapons.  He welcomed ideas for including an item on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities as a way to revitalize discussions.

AMRITH ROHAN PERERA (Sri Lanka), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the momentum created by the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons should be used to eliminate the sense of defeatism that permeated international disarmament deliberations and to revive the diminishing interest of States towards general and complete disarmament.  The elimination of nuclear stockpiles by nuclear-weapon States remained slow, nuclear weapon tests compromised the world’s peace and stability and there was a serious danger of nuclear material falling into terrorist hands.  While outer space exploration and use offered abundant opportunities, it was incumbent on those who undertook such activities to prevent outer space from becoming the theatre for an arms race, he stressed, recalling that Sri Lanka and Egypt had tabled a First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) resolution on that issue.  He also underlined as critical the implementation of and compliance with conventional weapons agreements, as well as ongoing discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

FRANCISCO TENYA HASEGAWA (Peru), associating himself with CELAC and the Non-Aligned Movement, emphasized the serious challenge posed by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, reiterated his country’s full commitment to the United Nations Programme of Action and stressed the value of international assistance, particularly with regard to border controls and capacity-building.  Noting that trafficking and diversion of such weapons promoted other illicit activities, he summarized the measures taken by Peru, including its ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty.  He added that relaunching the Conference on Disarmament was a matter of priority which needed to be addressed, and expressed concern that Member States had been unable to agree on a work programme.

MARTÍN GARCÍA MORITÁN (Argentina), associating himself with CELAC, said the general scenario on disarmament and non-proliferation was rife with challenges that required the international community to work towards broad consensus.  Inclusive and constructive dialogue which took into account the concerns and interests of all States was the best way to make progress.  In that regard, the Commission was a forum where agreements could be reached and deadlock broken.  He underscored the need to identify measures that would enable progress and proposed that delegations move away from “sterile pillarization” so as to ensure a fruitful session.

MALEEHA LODHI (Pakistan), associating herself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the Commission was meeting against a turbulent global security backdrop.  The negative trends in the disarmament and non-proliferation landscape were due largely to the lack of progress on the part of nuclear-weapon States in fulfilling their legal nuclear disarmament obligations, and could be further impeded by recent vows by some such States to “greatly strengthen and expand nuclear capabilities”.  Another key challenge was the granting of discriminatory waivers to some, and making exceptions for power or profit reasons, all of which constituted nuclear double standards and opened up the risk of diversion of materials intended for peaceful uses to military purposes.

Noting that many States — in particular in South Asia — continued to pursue those policies, she stressed that Pakistan had been left with no option but to “follow suit” in the introduction of nuclear weapons in order to restore strategic stability in the region and deter all forms of aggression.  Indeed, the country had made a number of proposals to keep South Asia free of such weapons but none had elicited a positive response.  “Our conduct continues to be defined by restraint and responsibility, and avoidance of an arms race,” she emphasized.  Outlining a number of factors to guide States to consensus in the Commission, she said agreement must proceed from the universally recognized premise that security was indivisible and based on the right of all States to equal security, both in the conventional and non-conventional fields.  She also emphasized the discriminatory nature of the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty and the urgency of providing legally binding assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States.

ANDRIY TSYMBALIUK (Ukraine) underscored the need for both nuclear and non-nuclear-weapon States to be involved in the non-proliferation regime, noting that his country had abandoned its nuclear capability and acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as removed all stocks of highly enriched uranium from its territory in 2012.  Ukraine’s decision to renounce nuclear weapons was primarily based on the international security guarantees provided by the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, which remained valid.  Expressing support for universalization of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, he urged finding common ground on the issue of existing fissile material stocks and starting negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty.  He also expressed support for implementation of the Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons, stressing that the issue of illicit transfer of conventional arms should also remain a priority, as the Russian Federation continued to transfer military goods to Ukraine’s territory.

ANA SILVIA RODRÍGUEZ ABASCAL (Cuba) said the Commission must take advantage of the current climate, including recent negotiations on a nuclear-weapon-ban treaty.  Meanwhile, she expressed concerns that some States were modernizing their nuclear arsenals and continuing to deploy them in other countries.  She regretted to mention other setbacks, including the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference’s inability to agree to an outcome document and the failure to hold a conference to negotiate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.  Nuclear disarmament should no longer to be postponed, ending up at the bottom of the Commission’s agenda.  Only the complete elimination of nuclear weapons would suffice, she said, emphasizing a need for a convention banning them as a step in that direction.

OMER DAHAB FADL MOHAMED (Sudan) said weapons of mass destruction threatened humanity as a whole and efforts must address issues including the proliferation of chemical weapons and other related arms.  Noting the failure of the most recent Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to agree to an outcome document, he said efforts must now be made to get on track towards disarmament and non-proliferation.  Sudan had supported action to prevent the spread of small arms and light weapons, which had led to thousands of deaths in the region, and had taken part in national, regional and international initiatives.  There was a clear link between the spread of those weapons and organized crime and terrorism, he said, underlining Sudan’s role in border control and other related efforts.  Combatting the spread of those arms must begin with the countries producing them.  As for States in need of help in tackling the scourge, technical assistance must be provided.

Right of Reply

The representative of Iran, speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he rejected the allegations made by the representative of the Israeli regime against his country.  Such lying and disinformation was intended to divert attention from Israel’s destabilizing actions and policies in the Middle East.  Israel had continued to flaunt all international regimes governing weapons of mass destruction, he said, adding that Israel was the only obstacle in the way of creating a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.  Nuclear weapons in the hands of the Israeli regime posed the most serious threat to the security of all States in the Middle East and to the non-proliferation regime, he said, adding that Israel had “arrogantly and flagrantly” violated at least 86 Security Council resolutions since 1948 in addition to well-documented atrocities and war crimes against the Palestinian and Lebanese people.

The representative of Syria, also referring to the statement of Israel’s representative, said those who lived in glass houses should not throw stones.  The Israeli regime had introduced nuclear, chemical, biological and radioactive terrorism to the region, he said.  It had also provided toxic weapons training and information to terrorist groups in Syria, in particular to Al-Nusrah and related agents.  It had moreover violated Security Council resolutions regarding counter-terrorism, while international reports had confirmed beyond a doubt its use of biological and chemical weapons.  He went on to say that Syria had declared that it was completely against any use of chemical weapons and had acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention.  By his statement, the Israeli entity’s representative had sought to draw attention away from the danger of its nuclear weapons, he said, adding that Israel had also been responsible for trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

Statements

RAFAEL RAMÍREZ (Venezuela), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement and CELAC, said he was worried about a new arms race and the implications that would have.  The challenge for the Commission in 2017 would be to break 18 years of deadlock caused by the position of a minority of Member States.  It was imperative to achieve real results, he said, urging nuclear-weapon States to show flexibility.  More than 70 years after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the main priority was the total elimination of nuclear weapons.  The momentum, enthusiasm and participation showed by delegations at the recent United Nations conference to negotiate a nuclear weapons prohibition treaty demonstrated the commitment of a majority of States to address the most serious threat to mankind.  Adoption of such an instrument would strengthen Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and provide a direction towards nuclear disarmament, he said, calling on all parties to put aside their own interests in favour of denuclearization, particularly in the Middle East.

JOHN A. BRAVACO (United States) said the 2016 Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations had not achieved consensus, yet had called for a nuclear-weapon-ban treaty and negotiations, which had been launched in March.  Such negotiations had been opposed by a number of countries, both nuclear weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States.  A nuclear-weapon-ban treaty would come with an enormous cost without achieving the elimination of a single warhead and risked deepening the divide between States, while ignoring the essential connection between disarmament and security.  The United States opposed the Working Group’s report and the General Assembly’s related resolution and would not participate in negotiations for such a convention.

Looking forward to the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference, he urged all States parties to recognize how the instrument had and would strengthen common interests.  There was a need to restore balance to dialogue, all with a view to enhancing national security.  A respectful dialogue must also consider all points of view with respect to issues such as non-compliance, the difficult national security environment and applying nuclear energy to meet sustainable development goals.  More broadly on the disarmament and non-proliferation field, the culture of consensus was needed, he said.  Deliberations on the Commission’s working group topics had been frank and useful in past sessions.  Some of the language in existing non-papers should be altered or removed with a view to achieving consensus at the end of the current session.  His delegation was prepared to engage constructively in discussions and expected all Member States to do the same.

KORNELIOS KORNELIOU (Cyprus) emphasized his country’s commitment towards progress in all disarmament forums.  It aspired to accede to the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Wasenaar Arrangement and, in that regard, expected objections raised by one country to be lifted.  That would spare all parties from unmerited politicization which only jeopardized the purpose of those treaties, he said, expressing also his country’s efforts to be vigilant vis-à-vis the threat of the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.  With regard to outer space, he said his nation valued the contribution of confidence-building measures, adding that it was essential for States to work collectively to keep outer space safe and secure for the benefit of mankind.

FERIDUN SINIRLIOĞLU (Turkey) said the Commission had a very important role to play by providing a platform for enhancing dialogue and cooperation as well as a sincere exchange of views.  He said his country wanted to build upon what had been done in the past two years, and that its delegation stood ready to contribute to consensual outcomes in the working group on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and in the working group on practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional weapons.

JAVIER GUTIERREZ (Spain) said the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was the basis of nuclear disarmament and the peaceful use of energy applications, anticipating a constructive preparatory meeting for the 2020 Review Conference.  The goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world must rest on concrete actions, including nuclear-weapon States eliminating their arsenals.  Nuclear-weapon-free zones were another important step, he said, expressing support for such a zone in the Middle East.  The Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty had reinforced a de facto prohibition on testing, he said, urging all States to sign and ratify the instrument so it could enter into force.  On verification, he hoped the Commission would pay due attention to the issue.  Sharing other concerns, he said weapons of mass destruction were the biggest threat facing the world, particularly if terrorists and other non-State actors obtained and used those arms.  In addition, conventional weapons and small arms had triggered the highest death toll and impact on States’ security and development, he said, expressing full support for the Arms Trade Treaty and related instruments.

MOHAMMED BESSEDIK (Algeria) said the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty must be universalized.  Alarmed by the consequences caused by the detonation of a nuclear warhead, Algeria had endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge, which had emerged from the 2014 Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.  Welcoming the United Nations Conference aimed at negotiating a nuclear-weapon-ban treaty, he encouraged Member States to participate in the process to consolidate other existing disarmament instruments.  Universal adherence to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was also essential, as was establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones, including in the Middle East.  Turning to conventional arms, he said the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons continued to threaten peace and stability in many countries.  On the basis of national experience, Algeria reaffirmed that the Programme of Action and the International Tracing Instrument were more relevant than ever before.

GEORGE WILHELM GALLHOFER (Austria) provided a snapshot of the first session of negotiations on a nuclear-weapon-ban treaty, saying that discussions had demonstrated a strong, united will to achieve a clear prohibition on those arms and a strong sense of urgency.  Such urgency should also be reflected in the Commission’s deliberations on recommendations to send to the Assembly.  “Extending the status quo or even accepting the strengthening of nuclear arsenals by modernization is clearly unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of States,” he said.  The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was the foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and an important element in the further development of applications for peaceful purposes.  On conventional weapons, he said Austria valued the contribution that practical confidence-building measures could make to the maintenance and enhancement of regional and international peace and security and supported relevant arms-related treaties.

FEH MOUSSA GONE (Côte d’Ivoire), associating himself with the African Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, said a complex situation had unfurled against a backdrop of 15,000 nuclear warheads, the spread of conventional weapons destabilizing countries and the Commission’s continued failure to make recommendations to the General Assembly.  “We must move forward,” he said, emphasizing an urgent need to settle differences.  Nuclear weapons remained the only weapons of mass destruction that were not prohibited by a legally binding instrument.  The strategies of nuclear deterrence must be excluded from national security efforts.  Debate must move forward to eliminate and shrink arsenals would lead to the universalization of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.  Nearly 20 years after its creation, the Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty had not yet entered into force, a precedent that might spread to other disarmament instruments.  Small arms and light weapons were another scourge and for its part, Côte d’Ivoire had taken steps, including in weapons control, arsenal management and care for victims.

SUN LEI (China) said nuclear disarmament could not be achieved overnight.  Rather, it could only be taken forward through a step-by-step approach, following the principles of maintaining global strategic stability and undiminished security for all.  “Negotiations on nuclear disarmament should only take place within the existing international disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, such as the Conference on Disarmament,” he said.  Countries with the largest nuclear arsenals should take the lead in reducing those weapons substantially and substantively, he said, thus creating the conditions for the complete destruction and total elimination of nuclear armaments.  Turning to conventional weapons, he said China hoped that the Arms Trade Treaty could contribute to solving problems resulting from the illicit trade of such arms, without prejudice to the security, sovereignty and reasonable national defence requirements of each country, as well as the legal arms trade between States.

HAMZA A. B. ALOKLY (Libya), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Group and the Arab Group, said disarmament remained both a priority and a legal commitment that must be multilateral.  The elimination of nuclear weapons by way of a legally binding document was the only reliable guarantee against their use, he said, expressing concern over a lack of progress on the part of nuclear-weapon States towards eliminating those stockpiles.  Nuclear-weapon-free zones, especially in the Middle East, would lead to significant progress in the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, he said, expressing hope that a review conference in 2020 would strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.  Furthermore, he encouraged all nations, including nuclear-weapon States, to participate in the negotiations which began in March on a treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons.

DAVID YARDLEY (Australia) said the fissile material cut-off treaty would be the next logical step in advancing nuclear disarmament.  It would be the most practical and effective way of contributing to “global zero” in the current strategic environment.  Noting that 2016 marked the twentieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, he said voluntary moratoriums on nuclear explosive tests were no substitute for a permanent and legally binding commitment to end nuclear testing and all other nuclear explosions, something that could only be achieved through the Treaty’s entry into force.  On conventional weapons, he said Australia would continue to work towards universalization of the Arms Trade Treaty, including working closely with States across the Indo-Pacific region.

PETR ILIICHEV (Russian Federation) said the Commission’s effective work was being stymied by the same problems affecting other elements of the United Nations disarmament machinery — the inability and sometimes a banal lack of will to allow reasonable compromises for the sake of reaching consensus.  Expressing the Russian Federation’s full support of the noble aim of building a nuclear-weapon-free world, he said that it was carrying out an unprecedented reduction of its nuclear arsenals.  It was also heading towards the full-scale implementation of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START Treaty).  The question was how to achieve the goal of nuclear disarmament.  Going forward, certain States must abandon attempts to ensure their security and military superiority at the expense and to the detriment of others, he said, emphasizing that serious joint work was urgently needed to create conditions conducive to nuclear disarmament.  Drawing attention to an alarming situation that had been caused by the unilateral and unconstrained deployment of United States missile defence assets in various regions, he said the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence systems’ deployment in the Republic of Korea had negatively affected the state of play in the region and no answer had yet to be provided with regard to what those systems were targeting.

Citing other concerns, he pointed to the development of conventionally armed strategic offensive weapons, weaponizing outer space and the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.  Those problems must be addressed; otherwise, further nuclear disarmament would be unconceivable.  “Delivering humanity from the nuclear threat is extremely complex and multifaceted,” he said.  “It has no simple solutions.  It would be a big mistake to assume that the problem of eliminating nuclear weapons could be sorted out by a simple vote for their blanket ban.”  The Russian Federation supported the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, including one in the Middle East, and championed efforts towards a conventional arms control treaty in Europe.  His country was also proposing new constructive ideas to revitalize the Commission’s work, including with regard to confidence-building measures and preventing an arms race in outer space.  With respect to the statement that had been made by his counterpart from Ukraine, he said Crimea had joined the Russian Federation through a referendum.

KIM IN RYONG (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, said the danger of nuclear war was growing day by day, with nuclear-weapon States increasing their arsenals in both quantity and quality.  Comprehensive and complete disarmament would only be possible when the United States no longer sought to bring down sovereign States by force, he said, adding that that country had pursued a strategy of dominating the world while modernizing its nuclear weapons.  Describing the Korean Peninsula as the world’s most dangerous hotspot, he said that the largest-ever joint military drills by the United States and the Republic of Korea were currently under way.

Self-defence was a sovereign country’s legitimate right, he said, adding that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea had no other choice than to go nuclear in the face of a consistent nuclear threat from the United States.  His country’s access to nuclear weapons had reduced the danger of nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula, he said, and it would continue to build up its nuclear forces so long as the United States and vessel forces conducted nuclear blackmail and war games on its doorstep.  Turning to allegations made earlier in the day by the representative of the Republic of Korea, he said they were “ridiculous” and intended to mislead the world.

FAIYAZ MURSHID KAZI (Bangladesh), associating himself with the Non-Aligned Movement, recalled forward-looking pronouncements made at the General Assembly’s 2013 high-level meeting on nuclear disarmament, which indicated there was sufficient political will to take the disarmament agenda forward.  What was perhaps missing was leadership and courage to turn that political will into demonstrable results and action.  Expressing support for negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear weapons convention, he said that non-nuclear-weapon States deserved legally binding assurances from nuclear-weapon States on refraining from the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against them.  That remained a priority for Bangladesh in the contest of the draft programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament and overall multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, he said.

DEVIKA LAL (India) said her delegation continued to believe in the inherent value of the Commission.  Emphasizing the value of multilateral outcomes, she urged it to show renewed commitment to the General Assembly’s call to revitalize its work.  She reiterated India’s support for a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons as proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement, and called for a trust-building dialogue among all States with nuclear weapons.  With regard to conventional weapons, she recommended practical confidence-building initiatives, adding that such measures must remain the prerogative of States concerned.

Right of Reply

The representative of Israel, speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said Iran was in violation of its obligations under relevant treaties, and that the Government of Syria used chemical weapons against its own people.

The representative of the United States said the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’s weapons programmes posed a grave threat to peace and security and violated United Nations resolutions.  That country’s actions had increased the international community’s resolve to address its weapons programmes, he said, urging it to fulfil its international obligations and return to serious talks.  Emphasizing that the United States would not accept the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea as a nuclear-weapon State, he said there were consequences to Pyongyang’s actions, adding that the United States would continue to increase its readiness against that growing threat.

The representative of the Republic of Korea stressed that seven major Security Council resolutions on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, including some adopted in 2016, reflected the views of the international community.  Underlining that no one was threatening that country, he urged Pyongyang to realize that no country would ever recognize it as a nuclear-weapon Power.

The representative of Syria said his counterpart from Israel had manipulated and distorted facts about certain actions.  The largest weapons dealers were predominantly Israeli military officers, and Israeli weaponry was fuelling crises around the world through involvement in illicit trade, pairing up with separatist movements, organized crime networks and organ traffickers.  The Israeli entity possessed chemical and other types of weapons, and had transported toxic chemical substances to terrorist groups in the region.  Syria had provided information on those actions and was now awaiting Security Council action, he said, adding that Israel had also trained and financed armed terrorist groups, including Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front.

The representative of Iran said that Israel’s delegate had levelled unfounded allegations against his country.  Noting that Israel’s history included occupation, atrocities and aggression against neighbours, he pointed out that it was not a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or any other similar convention, causing many States to express great concern over its nuclear programme.  A regime with such a history could not be trusted to have nuclear weapons, which posed a serious threat to international security.  Additionally, it had no respect for international law, flagrantly disregarding and violating the 86 Security Council resolutions, he said, describing those actions as realities, not allegations or lies.

The representative of Ukraine, responding to remarks by his counterpart from the Russian Federation, said the conflict in parts of eastern Ukraine had been caused by Russian aggression that had begun with the occupation of Crimea.  However, Ukraine was fully committed to implementation of the Minsk Agreements, he said, adding that if Russia stopped military support for its proxies, the Donbass situation would be settled soon.

The representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea rejected as “ridiculous” remarks by the United States and the Republic of Korea, saying they were a distortion of reality.  The United States had maintained a large number of nuclear weapons in the Republic of Korea since the 1950s, and had conducted annual joint military exercises with that country for more than 40 years.  With the United States upgrading its nuclear weapons, Pyongyang was forced to accelerate the development of its own nuclear arsenal, he emphasized.  Turning to the Republic of Korea’s statement, he said it was a wanton violation of his country’s sovereignty and dignity to call its defences a provocation and a threat.

The representative of the Russian Federation “completely refuted” Ukraine’s accusations about the 2014 referendum in Crimea and the presence of Russian military forces in that country.  At the time of the referendum, those forces had been legally present in Crimea, in accordance with an agreement between the two countries regarding the Black Sea fleet, he said, adding that Russian soldiers had not taken part in organizing the referendum.  Had the Ukrainian delegation been committed to implementing the Minsk Agreements and relevant Security Council resolutions, the conflict in eastern Ukraine would have ended long ago.

The representative of the Republic of Korea said the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea should realize that by totally rejecting unanimously adopted Security Council resolutions, it was telling the international community that it rejected the Council’s authority.  Did Pyongyang think that all Security Council members who had joined the last seven unanimously adopted resolutions had made unreasonable and wrong decisions?

The representative of the United States reiterated his country’s demand that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea fulfil its international obligations and return to serious talks.

The representative of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea rejected allegations by his counterparts from the United States and the Republic of Korea, warning that Pyongyang had no choice but “to go nuclear”.  As for the Security Council’s sanctions resolutions, he said there were no prohibitions on the type of testing undertaken by his country, and demanded clarification of the basis for those unfair and unjust resolutions.