

Draft Remarks, 3 March 2020

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Strengthening the NPT regime: Priorities for the 2020 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

4-5 March 2020

La Palm Royal Beach Hotel, Osu, Accra, Ghana

Introduction

Welcome to Accra.

It is a pleasure to welcome so many of you to Ghana.

I am honoured to have beeen given this opportunity to address such an impressive group of officials, experts and practitioners gathered for this important and timely meeting.

In two days, we will mark the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the NPT, and we are less than two months away from the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

The NPT has served global security well for 50 years. If there is one thing I would like to stress today, it is this: We must make sure that it continues to do so. Even in a time of a challenging security environment.

The global security environment

In the past few years we have witnessed a deterioration of the US-Russia strategic relationship, which has halted prospects for further arms control. We have to recognize that the future of major strategic relationships – including the US-China relationship – will have implications for broader arms control and nonproliferation efforts.

The international community has become increasingly divided over the role of nuclear deterrence, the vision of nuclear disarmament, and the commitment of States to implementing their nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI of the NPT.

This polarization, in addition to the current geopolitical backdrop and setbacks in nuclear arms control efforts, increasingly challenges the stability of the NPT regime.

And we cannot forget our grave concerns about the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, and the increasingly uncertain future of the JCPOA.

The 2020 NPT Review Conference

The NPT Review Conference (RevCon) in April and May (27.4–22.5), is an opportunity to sustain and strengthen the NPT by recognizing its achievements over its past five decades.

Despite current challenges, it is important to strive for a productive RevCon. NPT States Parties should be working together to take whatever steps possible – even if incremental – to demonstrate that progress remains possible under all three pillars of the NPT.

In that vein, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has sponsored the Nuclear Threat Initiative's Global Enterprise to Strengthen Nonproliferation and Disarmament, as well as NTI-sponsored regional workshops on the NPT, including this one here in Accra in partnership with AFRICSI.

Such unofficial forums are important platforms that, thanks to your participation, can contribute to strengthening the NPT and help shape the debate within the NPT community – identifying key areas of common interest among states to support progress toward the end state of a world free of nuclear weapons, and to make tangible near-term progress to advance the NPT's goals.

We believe sponsoring pragmatic initiatives like the Global Enterprise and its regional debates can help to facilitate progress at the Review Conference and help to sustain, reaffirm, and demonstrate the vital contribution of the NPT to reducing global dangers.

We are therefore very pleased to support this important workshop over the next couple of days. The agenda covers a wide range of issues, many of which are essential to building the foundation to achieve and maintain a world without nuclear weapons, and to facilitate the peaceful uses of nuclear energy around the globe.

This workshop will provide an important opportunity to highlight potential ways that governments can contribute to strengthening the NPT and the Review process, and help develop and build support for, practical steps, new initiatives, and tangible commitments that demonstrate the ability of NPT States Parties to work together to advance the Treaty's goals.

In particular, this meeting is a critical opportunity to discuss African regional perspectives on all three pillars of the NPT: disarmament, nonproliferation, and importantly for Africa, the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Nuclear Disarmament Verification

The last topic I would like to touch upon is one of great priority for Norway. One of the key building blocks we have for making progress under the NPT is nuclear disarmament verification.

Three years ago the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on Nuclear Disarmament Verification. The resolution called for the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on nuclear disarmament verification and to establish a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE).

Norway became the chair of the GGE, which last year agreed on a consensus report. The report establishes that

“verification is essential in the process of nuclear disarmament, and to achieving a world without nuclear weapons”;

and that a:

“credible verification regime in which all States have confidence will be essential for maintaining a world without nuclear weapons”.

I would like to emphasize that it was not evident that the GGE would be able to agree on a report. This was achieved because all were ready to make the necessary compromises. The process thus shows that it is possible to make progress and achieve consensus also within the disarmament pillar of the NPT.

Norway considers the work on verification to be an area where progress can be made at the upcoming NPT Review Conference and beyond. We are also pleased with last year’s resolution in the General Assembly that calls for a new GGE to be established for 2021–2022.

Norway has a long track record on nuclear disarmament verification. Starting in 2007, we have worked with the UK in the UK-Norway Initiative to prove that collaboration on nuclear verification between a nuclear-weapon state and a non-nuclear-weapon state is possible without either partner breaching their non-proliferation obligations under the NPT. The technical cooperation of the UK-Norway Initiative is now continuing as the Quad Nuclear Verification Partnership also including the U.S. and Sweden. Additionally, Norway has been pleased to sponsor and participate in the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), a collaborative project to build global verification expertise between the Nuclear Threat Initiative, the U.S. State Department, and more than 25 countries. The IPNDV stands out as a model of effective international collaboration showing that multilateral cooperation on verification is possible.

Speaking of verification, I am delighted to recognize Dr Lassino Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the CTBTO. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) has established a global norm against nuclear testing. Norway has been particularly engaged on the technical aspects of the CTBT, from the time of the Group of Scientific Experts whose work contributed to the negotiations that led to the CTT, and today as task leaders of several task groups in Working Group B.

Last words

Thank you very much again for giving me this opportunity to welcome you to Accra.

I look forward to hearing a readout from this event, and I thank you all for your commitment to safeguard and strengthening the NPT.