

Madam Chair,

Let me first thank you for all the efforts by you and your team over these past three weeks. We all know that yours was not an easy task.

All of us need to think about how to proceed after these weeks. While we cannot support this treaty, we appreciate how it has placed nuclear disarmament in the limelight and created a broad momentum for disarmament. While we would have liked to see more ambition reflected in its provisions, the treaty teaches us the valuable lesson that non-nuclear-weapon states have their own responsibilities and should not hesitate to take them. We would also like to express our appreciation for the NGO community present here and the valuable work that they have done.

The Netherlands aims to take these lessons to heart in moving forward from here. First, that means bridging the divide between supporters and detractors of this treaty. Broad support for this treaty – including by nuclear weapons possessors – is still far away. But we should not wait with seeking middle ground, starting at the upcoming First Committee. We plan to take that chance to explore how we can restore a shared sense of purpose to the disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

Second, we must not let our attention wither away. The draft before us rightfully recognizes the importance of education in this context. The Netherlands will look into new ways to support education and research into innovative solutions. We will also maintain focus on the risks associated with nuclear weapons and possible ways of mitigating these. In that context, one could think of security assurances, de-alerting, the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines, and other forms of risk reduction.

Third, we will continue to work towards the strengthening and implementation of the NPT in any way we can. This, of course, includes the elaboration of effective disarmament measures under Article VI. In this context, for example, we will continue our efforts in support of other disarmament-related initiatives such as the FMCT and disarmament verification. But we will also keep looking, with our partners, for other ways to further the implementation of the NPT. We will also keep striving towards increasing the transparency and inclusivity of its review process, building on the valuable experience we have gained as Chair of the 2017 PrepCom, and the regional conferences we have organized leading up to it.

Madam Chair,

Notwithstanding these positive aspects of the ban treaty movement, I regret to inform you that the Netherlands cannot support the draft that was put before us. We have signaled at the beginning of this session that we would be unable to sign up to any instrument that is incompatible with our NATO obligations, that contains inadequate verification provisions or that undermines the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

We have negotiated in good faith and have been open about our intentions. Now we must be equally straightforward and conclude that this draft does not meet our criteria.

The obligations in Article 1 are incompatible with our commitments as a NATO state. We attempted to rhyme these facts with the spirit of the treaty by introducing a temporality clause, but most delegations here could not reconcile that with their views on a nuclear weapons ban.

The draft is, in essence, not verifiable. This harms its credibility. Of course, nuclear disarmament verification is something that we have just started to develop. The draft, however, fails to incorporate that notion by leaving sufficient flexibility for future developments, or by encouraging its members to participate in verification-related initiatives. Moreover, the draft contains a safeguards standard that even in this day is not sufficient for the IAEA to draw a conclusion about the absence of undeclared nuclear activities. It will certainly not provide the kind of assurances needed towards a nuclear-weapon free world.

Like many others here, we have argued that this treaty should strengthen and complement the NPT, as reflected by resolution 71/258. This text does not do that. Instead, it places the treaty above the NPT and sets up a comprehensive parallel review mechanism, to which it assigns a mandate that at least partially overlaps with that of the NPT. This is a recipe for competition and fragmentation when our efforts on disarmament should be concentrated. Let us not forget: the NPT contains the only disarmament obligations binding the P5. Whatever its shortcomings may be, this makes it our primary framework for pursuing a world without nuclear weapons.

Madam Chair,

I started by pointing out how we can build on this process here to further advance the cause of nuclear disarmament.

We still have a lot of work ahead of us. We have heard many times that this treaty is not aiming to weaken existing instruments but to encourage their further implementation. All of us who support nuclear disarmament must ensure that, and refocus our efforts so that we can look forward towards further progress.

Thank you.