Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

26 April 2019

Original: English

Third session
New York, 29 April–10 May 2019

Operationalizing the Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND) Initiative

Working paper submitted by the United States of America

1. The 2019 meeting of the NPT Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) is an opportunity for NPT Parties to lay the groundwork for successful outcomes at the 2020 RevCon. Throughout the 2020 NPT review cycle, the United States has sought to promote a more realistic dialogue on nuclear disarmament, in part to enable such outcomes.

2. At the 2017 NPT PrepCom, the United States submitted a Working Paper (NPT/CONF.2020/ PC.I/WP.39) that highlighted how maintaining a strong non-proliferation regime helps create conditions conducive to progress on disarmament. As that paper laid out, the core provisions of the NPT – non-proliferation (Articles I-III), peaceful uses of nuclear energy (Article IV), and disarmament (Article VI) – are sometimes mistakenly portrayed as competing interests, but in fact represent the shared interests of all NPT Parties. In particular, the paper emphasized that the maintenance of a strong nonproliferation regime enables peaceful nuclear cooperation and helps create an environment more conducive to nuclear disarmament.

3. That Working Paper described the non-proliferation regime's impressive record over the past 50 years in advancing these shared interests. Rather than a cascade of nuclear proliferation, as many feared on the eve of the NPT's entry into force, the number of states that possess such weapons remains fewer than ten. The past half century has also witnessed great progress in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy, science, and technology, as well as the ever-expanding benefits from the dissemination of those applications. Substantial progress has also been made in reducing nuclear risks and on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament. The success of the nonproliferation regime helped make possible this progress on peaceful uses and on disarmament.

4. Although nonproliferation is a necessary enabler for further progress on nuclear disarmament, however, it is not the only factor which must be considered as NPT Parties chart a course for such further progress. The nature of the prevailing security environment is also critical to the prospects for disarmament progress.

5. The challenges of disarmament cannot be met merely by attempting to reduce or prohibit nuclear weapons while ignoring the challenges of the security environment, and simply waiting for the international security environment to improve will likely only make conditions worse. Any viable path toward disarmament therefore must take into consideration, and try to ameliorate, the problems of the security environment that presently impede progress toward this shared goal.

6. The importance of addressing the conditions of the security environment has frequently been noted in U.S. strategy documents – not least in the 2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and the National Defense Strategy, both of which noted the dramatic deterioration in the security environment in recent years. The NPR also emphasized the continuing U.S. desire for negotiated answers to the challenges presented by nuclear weapons, making clear that the United States remains "committed to arms control efforts that advance U.S., allied, and partner security; are verifiable and enforceable; and include partners that comply responsibly with their obligations."

7. Illustrating its continuing commitment to pursuing "effective measures" on disarmament within the meaning of Article VI of the NPT – and to easing tension and strengthening trust between states in order to facilitate disarmament, as called for in the Treaty's Preamble – the United States submitted another Working Paper to the 2018 PrepCom (NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.30), introducing the concept that was then called "Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament." In that paper, the United States called for a dialogue to address the underlying security concerns that have made nuclear deterrence necessary in order to forestall major power conflict and maintain global stability. As that paper made clear, such a dialogue would embody the spirit of the NPT and represent a realistic and promising path forward for global disarmament discourse. To elicit serious contributions from all interested parties, the United States outlined some of the discrete tasks that would need to be accomplished to create an environment more conducive to further disarmament.

A Collaborative Approach

8. Over the last year, the United States has taken every opportunity to build on the concepts in these Working Papers and solicit feedback on how best to operationalize this dialogue. In its bilateral engagements, the United States has heard from a variety of potential partners about how they believe such a dialogue could achieve practical results. At this year's NATO Conference on Weapons of Mass Destruction in Reykjavik and in unofficial meetings convened by various think tanks, the United States also encouraged participants to contribute their ideas on possible dialogue topics and formats. Additionally, the United States hosted a topical plenary discussion on this concept at the Conference on Disarmament (CD), and took part in an academic colloquium on nuclear disarmament, hosted by the Dutch Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, which led to fruitful discussions among academics, civil society, and diplomats on their ideas relating to the substantive concepts underlying the current and potential future international security environment.

9. Throughout these engagements, the United States has sought input on how to make this initiative a success, so that it can begin to chart a path forward for disarmament in a challenging environment. It is the hope of the United States that the 2020 NPT Review Cycle will be remembered as one in which the world decided

to pursue a more promising path toward nuclear disarmament and the fulfilment of the Treaty's disarmament provisions.

Goals

10. Following this constructive engagement and after reviewing thoughtful suggestions, the United States proposes to launch a structured dialogue on Creating an Environment for Nuclear Disarmament (CEND). The United States envisions two main goals for this dialogue. The first is to make concrete progress in identifying and addressing the factors in the international security environment that inhibit prospects for further progress in disarmament. This outcome may help to re-establish more favorable conditions for global peace and security and decrease the chances of violent conflict, building trust and transparency between nuclear-armed nations. The second goal is to establish a more pragmatic approach to disarmament that can contribute to a successful outcome at 2020 RevCon. Other participants in this initiative will also have the opportunity to identify additional shared goals of the CEND process.

Operationalizing the Initiative

11. The first step in launching the CEND initiative will take place at the 2019 PrepCom, at which the United States will host a side event highlighting how this initiative will operate. The United States will invite States to be involved based in part on the need for political and geographic diversity. The number of direct participants will be limited in order to facilitate and manage focused deliberations, but those deliberations will be informed by the Group's broader interactions with the global community. Non-participants who want to provide their views are encouraged to work with participants within or outside of their regions to ensure that their inputs are included in the CEND process.

12. The first meeting of the Creating an Environment Working Group (CEWG) Plenary will take place this summer in Washington. The CEWG Plenary will identify a list of issues or questions relating to the international security environment affecting disarmament prospects, and establish subgroups to examine and address these factors. These factors may take any form and should derive from an honest and constructive accounting of key security challenges. For example, these factors could be structured around three broad areas: (1) measures to modify the security environment to reduce incentives for states to retain, acquire, or increase their holdings of nuclear weapons; (2) institutions and processes nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states can put in place to bolster nonproliferation efforts and build confidence in nuclear disarmament; or (3) interim measures to reduce the likelihood of war among nuclear-armed states.

13. The CEWG Plenary will also discuss approaches for engaging countries that are non-participants in the CEWG. Participating countries will be asked to continue to engage with countries outside the group, particularly within their respective regions, in order to solicit and reflect the broadest possible range of perspectives.

14. Following the CEWG Plenary meeting, subgroups will meet periodically for dialogue centered around their respective mandates and to prepare progress reports to the CEWG. They will also undertake intersessional work as needed to fulfill their mandates and programs of work. These formal meetings and intersessional work will form the core of the dialogues taking place around the CEND factors.

The United States intends to identify one or more non-governmental organization(s) to help facilitate dialogue and provide logistical support.

15. At the 2020 RevCon, CEWG participants will provide updates on CEWG activities and share any initial conclusions. The CEND process is intended to extend beyond the RevCon, however, in sustained pursuit of NPT Parties' collective nuclear disarmament goals and will follow the programs of work and timelines established through consensus by the participants.

Conclusion

16. Given the deteriorating security environment, progress toward the disarmament goals articulated in the Preamble and Article VI of the NPT has slowed. The global discourse on disarmament has become stale and unfulfilling, avoiding genuine consideration of the most challenging barriers to progress. In promoting the CEND initiative, the United States seeks to move past this unproductive dialogue, to help build a more stable global security environment, open new avenues for real progress on disarmament, and collectively advance widely shared interests. The United States hopes that constructive engagement and open dialogue around this critical issue will help move the world forward on nuclear disarmament and help enable positive outcomes at the 2020 RevCon and beyond.