

**UNIDIR seminar to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons**

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**Remarks by H.E. Mr. Gerard Corr,
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Madam Chair, High Representative, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to take part in this event to mark the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This achievement forty years ago marked the culmination of several years of work here in Geneva, in New York and elsewhere, and represented in a concrete form the desire of States to preserve mankind from the terrible prospect of nuclear war. It was a recognition that only a new interlocking framework of non-proliferation and disarmament could provide a strategic counter-balance to the instability, political and military, that had come into the world. A Pandora's box had been opened, and had to be contained and, one day, closed.

The very first resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, in 1946, called for "control of atomic energy to the extent necessary to secure its use only for peaceful purposes" and for "the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction". While at the time of the adoption of that resolution only one State had tested or used a nuclear weapon, the next ten years saw the development and testing of nuclear weapons by two more States. Concerns about the danger to humanity posed by the proliferation and risk of the use of nuclear weapons grew steadily.

In 1958, at the thirteenth session of the UN General Assembly, the Irish Minister for External Affairs, Frank Aiken, devoted attention to the dangers posed by the spread of nuclear weapons. In the General Debate, and in the First Committee, he set out in clear and stark detail the peril in which humanity stood, in the context of the Cold

War, and called for the taking of measures to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons.

As a practical step to address the concerns expressed by Minister Aiken and shared by many other delegations, Ireland tabled a resolution with a view to the establishment of an ad hoc committee to study the dangers inherent in the further dissemination of nuclear weapons and to recommend appropriate measures for averting these dangers. While that draft resolution was eventually withdrawn, Ireland requested a vote on its second preambular paragraph, which recognised that “the danger now exists that an increase in the number of States possessing nuclear weapons may occur, aggravating international tension and the difficulty of maintaining world peace”. The Irish delegation took satisfaction from the fact that no Member State of the UN opposed this paragraph.

The draft resolution was the forerunner of a number of other resolutions in subsequent years on the prevention of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons, which became known as the “Irish resolutions”.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that Ireland sought only to freeze the status quo regarding the possession of nuclear weapons as it existed in 1958, or in the subsequent years in which we tabled our resolution. Minister Aiken made very clear in his various statements in the General Assembly that Ireland regarded restriction of the further spread of nuclear weapons as a preliminary step towards their abolition.

The discussions in the UN General Assembly and the adoption of the Irish resolutions led to acceptance of the concept of an international agreement setting out basic obligations of both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States and to agreement in the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Committee here in Geneva in 1968 on the text of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Ireland was the first State to ratify the NPT.

Ever since the NPT came into existence, Ireland’s highest priority in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation has been support for efforts to strengthen the Treaty and to ensure full respect for all of its provisions. The NPT today remains the

arch and cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We are proud of our history of association with it.

Madam Chair,

A sign of the continued strong attachment of my country to the NPT was the founding, almost twelve years ago in Dublin, of the New Agenda Coalition, which includes Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa and Sweden as well as Ireland. The foundation of the Coalition was accompanied by the presentation of a joint statement by the Foreign Ministers of the group, entitled "Towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World: The Need for a New Agenda". This called on the governments of each of the nuclear-weapon States and the three nuclear-weapons-capable States that had not acceded to the NPT to commit themselves unequivocally to the elimination of their respective nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capability and to agree to start work immediately on the practical steps and negotiations required for its achievement.

The first result of the new group's activity was the negotiation at the NPT Review Conference in 2000, by the NAC, with strong support from civil society and like-minded governments, of a commitment from the nuclear-weapon States to 13 Practical Steps for systematic and progressive nuclear disarmament. An unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals was given and a framework agreed for its delivery.

It is a matter of great concern and disappointment that the intervening years have seen little advance in the implementation of these 13 Steps and indeed that some of the nuclear-weapon States have called this commitment into question. Little progress has been seen on some of the other commitments entered into by States Parties earlier, as part of the package of three decisions and a resolution on the Middle East which enabled the indefinite extension of the Treaty in 1995. The failure of the 2005 Review Conference to produce any substantive outcome compounds the difficult situation in which the NPT finds itself.

However, recent developments have given some grounds for optimism. We have seen renewed attention to nuclear disarmament on the part of politicians and other influential personalities in a broad range of countries. The leadership provided by some of the nuclear-weapons States is welcome. The transformation of some of these encouraging statements into concrete agreements, or decisions at the national level, would go a long way towards creating an atmosphere conducive to a successful Review Conference in May.

What would a successful Review Conference involve? First and foremost, the Review Conference is a vital opportunity to restore international confidence in the ability of States to work together for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, confidence which was severely dented by the failure of 2005. Commitments undertaken by all NPT States Parties in 1995 and 2000, including in the resolution on the Middle East, must be taken forward and implemented. We need to see a balanced, consensual and forward-looking package of decisions agreed, including concrete and measurable steps for the way ahead under each of the pillars of the Treaty.

Ireland will work closely with its partners in the New Agenda Coalition and in the EU for an ambitious outcome to the 2010 Review Conference. Working papers submitted by the NAC to the Preparatory Committee set out the main issues which we believe must be addressed, including universality; nuclear doctrines; reductions in nuclear forces; security assurances; nuclear-weapon-free zones; negotiation of a treaty on fissile material; and testing of nuclear weapons. Other areas which we believe should receive attention include transparency and confidence-building, including transparency on reductions of warhead numbers and reductions in operational status.

Madam Chair,

The opportunity presented by this year's Review Conference to strengthen the authority of the Treaty is one which we cannot afford to miss. While circumstances may be more propitious than they have been for some time, the task of ensuring success will not be an easy one. I am glad that the President-designate of the Review Conference is here on the podium today, and wish to assure him of the full support and cooperation of my country, both at the Review Conference and in preparation for

it. However, a successful outcome to the Review Conference cannot be delivered by the President alone. All States Parties, individually and collectively, need to play their part, to build bridges, to display flexibility and openness to the views of others. This is a common endeavour. There is no more urgent task facing us.

I thank you, Madam Chair.