

France, United Kingdom & United States

Explanation of vote – 27 October 2016

Delivered by France

I'm delivering an explanation of vote on behalf of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and France. I'd like to explain the vote on L.23 the consequences of nuclear weapons, L.24 humanitarian pledge for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and L.36 ethical imperatives for a nuclear weapons free world.

Many have argued that the devastating humanitarian consequences could arise due to the use of nuclear weapons. We agree. However, neither the consequences nor the concerns are new. These were enshrined in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1968. They are enshrined in the outcome document of the first special session on disarmament in 1978. The question is what conclusions we can draw. Some of those referring to the humanitarian consequences contend that the route to nuclear disarmament is to prohibit the possession and use of nuclear weapons now, even if states possessing nuclear weapons do not sign up to this prohibition. We feel this is the intent behind these three resolutions, in particular L.24, which clearly calls for the pursuit of a legal instrument to prohibit these weapons.

We believe a ban on nuclear weapons is liable to undermine the review process of the NPT by rendering consensus impossible, thereby creating a far less secure world, a reflection of what we saw prior to the entry into force of the universality of the NPT. At that time, many regions were faced with the prospect of nuclear proliferation, uncertainty and mistrust. This proposed ban fails to take into account the requisite security considerations and this will not eliminate nuclear weapons. It will contravene a consensus-based approach, which for several decades has been able to allow us to implement and strengthen the NPT regime with its three pillars, and this will deepen the divide amongst NPT states parties who are committed to pursuing a world without nuclear weapons.

This has been set forth in our national statements earlier in the session to build a nuclear-weapons-free world that remains free of nuclear weapons. We believe that a step-by-step approach is the only way to combine the imperatives of disarmament and of the maintenance of global security. Working together we can set the stage and create the conditions in which nuclear weapons will no longer be needed.

I'd also like to deliver a statement on behalf of the US, France and the UK on draft resolution L.41 taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. As nuclear weapons state under the NPT, our three countries reaffirm the shared goal of nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. As referenced in the preamble and Article VI of the NPT, our commitment to a safer and more secure world for all and a world without nuclear weapons remains unshakable. To that end, we continue to pursue a progressive, step-by-step approach so as to promote stability and international peace and security upon the basis of greater, undiminished security for all. This proven approach to nuclear disarmament has yielded concrete results and continues to enhance global security. This is the only realistic path towards full implementation of NPT Article VI.

We believe that only a consensus-based approach, which takes into account the global security context, can yield positive results in terms of nuclear disarmament. The negotiation of an international prohibition on nuclear weapons will certainly not bring us closer to the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. In this regard, significant achievements have already been made. We emphasise the significant efforts undertaken to cease the nuclear arms race as called for in Article VI of the NPT, we reaffirm our intention never to engage in such an arms race.

Global stockpiles in nuclear weapons are presently at the lowest point in nearly half a century, due to the concerted and sustained efforts of nuclear weapons states. All states can contribute to the attainment of that goal by creating the necessary security environment. Namely, by eliminating nuclear tensions, by tackling fully proliferation challenges, by promoting collective security and by making progress in all areas of arms control and disarmament, the NPT and existing disarmament machinery as set forth in the final document of SSOD 1 have demonstrated that this is a robust framework to advance nuclear disarmament and to provide opportunities for constructive mutually beneficial dialogue. In this regard we reaffirm our support and our willingness to explore all possibilities and all ways to get the CD back on track. We shall take into account all previous proposals and agreements, while bearing in mind the NPT 2010 Action Plan. To that end, we reaffirm the ongoing relevance of all provisions of the consensus-based action plan adopted during the 2010 NPT review conference. This remains a critical roadmap for implementation of all three pillars of NPT.

While we respect the views and legitimate concerns of countries supporting this resolution, L.41, as regards progress in nuclear disarmament, we believe that progress shall only occur through a practical approach to disarmament. We do not accept the premise underlying this to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons. A prohibition of nuclear weapons, in and of itself, will not improve international security, nor will it strengthen trust and transparency amongst nuclear weapons states, nor will it help to address the significant technical and procedural challenges stemming from nuclear disarmament verification.

We are dismayed at the fact that the disarmament debate has turned in this direction. We remain open to all other channels for discussion. However, they must be genuinely inclusive and they must be fully anchored in the global security context. We are committed to a world without nuclear weapons. However, such a world will only be achieved through a steady significant effort to only put in place necessary conditions that do not exist. This contravenes a consensus-based approach which has prevailed for decades on the NPT and three pillars. This is indispensable for the maintenance of international peace and security. It will set back the cause by further deepening the divide among NPT states parties. It will also jeopardise a consensus-based approach of the NPT review process and will divert attention from practical disarmament measures.

For these reasons, our governments have not taken part in the Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament, the OEWDG. Its recommendations, especially on a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, can in no way constitute an acceptable basis for negotiations. We urge all states to focus their energy on strengthening the three pillars of the NPT, on supporting the IAEA safeguard system and existing disarmament machinery, and on developing both the political and technical tools and the conditions conducive to disarmament.

We will continue to support the entry into force of the CTBT. We underscore the need to maintain momentum towards all elements of the treaty verification regime. We also support the start of negotiations on a fissile material cut off treaty as well as the promotion of nuclear disarmament verification. These are critical steps as we move towards a nuclear weapons free world.

In this regard our countries will support resolutions L.28 on the comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, L.57 on nuclear disarmament verification and L.65 on the FMCT. Whilst reaffirming our commitment to continuing our individual and collective efforts to advance nuclear disarmament, we shall vote against draft resolution L.41.