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Opening remarks on the occasion of the screening of the documentary “The Man who saved the World” at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 22 September 2015 at the Palais des Nations

By Marco Kalbusch, Office for Disarmament Affairs, United Nations, Geneva

Excellency, Ms. Espinosa, Permanent Representative of Ecuador,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be with you today. Please allow me first to thank the Permanent Mission of Ecuador, the UNFOLD ZERO campaign, and the NGO Committee for Disarmament for organizing this event.

Today, we mark two important days: the International Day for Peace and the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. Achieving global nuclear disarmament is one of the enduring goals of the United Nations. The General Assembly in its first resolution (Resolution 1/1) in 1946 called for “[T]he elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons.” Yet today, almost seventy years later, nuclear weapons remain a reality in national arsenals and security and defense doctrines. More than half of the world’s population still lives in countries that either have such weapons or are members of military alliances with nuclear weapons. But one should also note that 115 countries have decided to establish Nuclear Weapon Free Zones in Africa, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific; Mongolia’s self-declared nuclear-weapon-free status has been recognized internationally through the adoption of UN General Assembly resolution 55/33S, and several international treaties deal with the denuclearization of certain areas, such as the Antarctic Treaty, the Outer Space Treaty, the Moon Agreement and the Seabed Treaty.

While the doctrine of nuclear deterrence remains entrenched in the security policies of a number of States, concerns over the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons are underpinning new efforts to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons provides an occasion for the world community to reaffirm its commitment to global nuclear disarmament as a high priority. When it declared 26 September as The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, the General Assembly stressed the need “to mobilize international efforts towards achieving the common goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.”¹ This day provides an opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas about the dangers of these weapons and how we can continue down the path that leads us to a nuclear weapon free world.

Movies are an excellent opportunity for reflection. The movie we will see today “The Man who saved the World” is no exception. The story of Stanislav Petrov is a grim reminder of the dangers of the existence of nuclear weapons. His decision on 26 September 1983 was an individual act that might have prevented the world from nuclear war, but as the Acting High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. KIM Won-soo recently stated in Hiroshima, “a world free of nuclear weapons is our common responsibility”.²

To achieve the goal set by the GA in resolutions 1/1 and 68/32, the world has to take the path to a world free of nuclear weapons together. This requires action by States possessing nuclear

¹ General Assembly Resolution 68/32.

² <https://unoda-web.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/wsk-ahbombs.pdf>

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weapons, by States not possessing these weapons, and the fundamental involvement of civil society.

The importance of cooperation was stressed by the Secretary-General in his statement on the International Day of Peace. He noted that the theme of this year's commemoration is "Partnerships for Peace - Dignity for All", and highlighted the importance of all segments of society to work together to strive for peace. Disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, is a key element in the quest for peace and all segments of the international society need to be involved.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs will continue to do its share by working with Member States, international organizations and civil society, by supporting the disarmament machinery, including the Conference on Disarmament, with professionalism, expertise and commitment. It will also continue its cooperation with non-governmental groups in advancing the cause of disarmament.

In the 70 years since the founding of the United Nations, much has been achieved in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and international security, in the area of conventional arms as well as in the area of weapons of mass destruction, in building confidence among States and furthering regional disarmament, and in involving the youth through disarmament and peace education. So maybe it is also time for optimism. International days on specific topics are meant to encourage us to achieve goals.

This afternoon, watching the movie together and debating with each other will also contribute to a better understanding of positions, to building trust by deepening common knowledge of the subject matter and in identifying possible ways to achieve the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, as the General Assembly stated in Resolution 68/32.

In closing, allow me to once again to thank the Permanent Mission of Ecuador, the UNFOLD ZERO campaign, and the NGO Committee for Disarmament for organizing this event. My colleagues and I look forward to an interactive discussion after the movie.