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**Open-ended Working Group taking forward  
multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations<sup>1</sup>****Geneva 2016**

Item 5 of the agenda

**Taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations****The road to zero: The progressive approach****Submitted by Belgium, Canada, Germany, Latvia and Netherlands**

1. A world without nuclear weapons is a vision shared by an overwhelming majority of states and an aspiration of mankind. While there is wide agreement on this goal, there is considerably less agreement on how to make it a reality. Some argue that given the apparent deadlock in nuclear disarmament, a ban on nuclear weapons would accelerate the process, since banning a weapon has always been a precondition for its elimination. But it should be pointed out that in the case of the Chemical as well as the Biological and Toxic Weapon Conventions most of the possessor States took part in the drafting of the pertinent ban treaties. Similarly, a number of possessor States took the lead with regard to the Ottawa and Oslo Conventions. However, a similarly inclusive process seems unlikely with regard to nuclear weapons, at least today.

2. The concept of “Global Zero” was prominently introduced into the debate by the four elder statesmen Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn. It is worth noting that they do not mention the concept of a ban as a precondition for progress. Rather, they focus on concrete steps to be taken by the nuclear-weapon States, but also by the international community at large. They also remind us that “a world without nuclear weapons will not simply be today’s world minus nuclear weapons”.<sup>2</sup> In other words, to make headway, the security dimension of nuclear weapons must also be taken into consideration. Whether we like it or not, nuclear deterrence is still part of the defence strategies of states or groups of states in a number of regions, also in the form of extended nuclear deterrence. A world without nuclear weapons will have to rely much more on mechanisms of cooperative security instead. An international order for a nuclear weapon free world might require changes also with regard to the functioning of the United Nations system. It might thus bring about fundamental changes to the international order no less demanding than those imposed on mankind by climate change. This paper does not aim to deal with all of these profound questions, but rather focuses on elements which are directly

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<sup>1</sup> Established pursuant to resolution 70/33 of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

<sup>2</sup> Deterrence in the Age of Nuclear Proliferation; The Wall Street Journal, March 7 2011.

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linked to the NPT Review Process. Our basic position is laid out in the joint working paper “A progressive approach to a world free of nuclear weapons: revisiting the building blocks paradigm”. In this working paper, we attempt to flesh out some of the building blocks and the sequencing in more detail.

3. The four elder statesmen made a number of proposals, many of which were subsequently incorporated into the Action Plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference. The Action Plan calls upon the nuclear-weapon States to engage, inter alia to reduce their stocks, reduce the role and salience of nuclear weapons in military doctrines, and to reduce the alert status of their nuclear weapons. All these calls are based on the underlying principle of undiminished security for all. The 2010 Action Plan and the measures contained therein remain valid even though the current situation is not propitious for progress in all domains, particularly after the illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine.

4. The four elder statesmen also addressed the complex geopolitical implications of working towards Zero. Obviously, not all conflicts around the globe will have to be resolved in order for Global Zero to become a reality. But there is no denying the fact that the possession of nuclear weapons by States outside the NPT framework is linked to specific bilateral or regional situations, which have to be transformed in order to create an environment allowing the abolition of nuclear weapons. The Korean peninsula, where the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is attempting nuclear blackmail, is a case in point, as is South East Asia. The goal of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is another building block for progress towards “Zero” that includes working towards a comprehensive arms control and peace regime, particularly for this troubled region.

5. That progress can be achieved even in difficult times was demonstrated by the agreement reached in July 2015 between the E3+3 and Iran on a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This agreement clearly strengthens the NPT as the foundation for both nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

6. Thus, working towards Zero implies taking into account the bigger picture. This could also have been the approach and intention of the drafters of the NPT, who included the task of “general and complete disarmament” in Article VI of the Treaty. While we have made considerable progress on ending the nuclear arms race and on nuclear disarmament, this more comprehensive task under Article VI could require further extensive discussions.

7. On a more practical level, which steps should be taken next if we follow the progressive approach? In our opinion, the next and most pressing step will consist of yet another **substantial nuclear arms control agreement between the United States of America and the Russian Federation**, since these two states control more than 90 per cent of the global stockpiles. A proposal was made by President Obama in 2013 in Berlin and repeated at the Nuclear Security Summit on 1 April 2016. It should be taken up as soon as conditions allow.

8. With the implementation of such a New START follow-up agreement, we see a strong case for **involving all nuclear-weapon States in the ensuing arms control and disarmament round**. This would partly depend on how substantial a negotiated follow-up reduction would be. At any rate, the already existing “P5/N5-process” could represent the nucleus of such an enlarged negotiating forum. It would be desirable to see a widened agenda of the P5/N5 dialogue to include issues such as de-alerting or crisis prevention early on.

9. In parallel, **multilateral nuclear disarmament** urgently needs to be revitalised. Multilateral agreements mentioned in the 2010 Action Plan should at last enter into force (CTBT), or negotiations be started (FMCT, instrument on negative security assurances). The Conference on Disarmament as the only multilateral permanent disarmament forum

remains the preferential forum for negotiations. However, if the deadlock is not overcome sooner rather than later, patience will give out and other venues will be identified.

10. In line with this comprehensive proposal and the progressive approach we support, the **denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula** must remain high on the international agenda. North Korea can never be accepted as a nuclear weapon State. It must stop its blatant breaches of binding United Nations Security Council resolutions and comply with its international obligations.

11. Further, the project of a **zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East** should be pursued in a persistent and realistic way. The States in the region bear the primary responsibility for progress, since any agreement can only hold if it is freely arrived at by the States in the region. While we continue to stand ready to provide support, regional ownership will remain key for progress.

12. Simultaneously, it is important to further strengthen the legal status of existing **nuclear weapon free zones**. To date, only the protocols to the Treaty of Tlatelolco have been ratified by all nuclear-weapon States. Nuclear weapon free zones are important stepping stones on the way towards a nuclear weapon free world. They reinforce the prohibition on non-nuclear-weapon States from acquiring nuclear weapons already enshrined in the NPT and lay the basis for negative security assurances. Furthermore, the question of how to encourage confidence building between **India and Pakistan**, including through arms control and disarmament, should also be tackled. Regional stability would benefit from a curb on the current expansion and diversification of their nuclear arsenals. It would be helpful if both States refrained from increasing their arsenals. Coordinated signature of the CTBT by both States could also be another valuable confidence building measure.

13. This list of steps is anything but exhaustive. But it serves to illustrate just how hard progress will be. An important landmark on the way to Zero will be the time when we reach the “minimisation” point, i.e. when weapons numbers are reduced globally to a very low level and a reliable international verification regime with effective verification techniques and methods is established.

14. Looking towards a world free of nuclear weapons and with a long term perspective, it will be necessary to give further thought to how a non-discriminatory and internationally verifiable nuclear disarmament framework such as a multilateral nuclear weapons convention or a plurilateral arrangement among those with nuclear weapons would look. Such a legally binding final “building block” would give States assurances that nuclear weapons had been irreversibly disarmed and that no new weapons were being produced. It could be seen as the final step in the implementation of Article VI of the NPT. The inclusion of all nuclear-weapon States and ideally all other States with nuclear weapons in any such negotiation would be a self-evident requirement. Still, before we reach this minimisation point, a lot of work needs to be done.

15. The prevailing environment of trust and confidence will influence the development towards such a final measure, and must remain an important consideration as we continue to move towards our shared goal. An early contribution to building trust and confidence would be a consensus on a broad and flexible “framework”, including political and legal measures, which should drive the disarmament process. As argued in this paper, the overall security environment and balance as well as regional aspects of any such framework should be taken very seriously. The Open-ended Working Group could make a valuable contribution to the indispensable dialogue with the NWS during the upcoming NPT Review Cycle.