Briefing to the Meeting of the Security Council
Nonproliferation: Supporting the Nonproliferation Treaty
ahead of the 2020 Review Conference

Remarks by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

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H.E. Mr. President of the Security Council,

H.E. Mr. Heiko Maas, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany,

H.E. Mr. Gustavo Zlauvinen, President-designate of the NPT Review Conference,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate the Belgian presidency for convening this session and building on last year’s initiative by Germany. The Council’s continued attention to nuclear weapons and to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons - or NPT in particular - are testament to the role of both in international peace and security.

It is entirely fitting that this body consider the achievements and the future of the NPT. After all, the NPT is a pillar of international peace and security. Few multilateral treaties, let alone security treaties, can lay claim to the record of success that the NPT can. For fifty years now, it has provided collective security benefits to all its States parties.

It remains an enduring example of the value of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation measures as supporting pillars of international peace and security, no matter the climate of the day.

The Treaty continues to successfully constrain the proliferation of nuclear weapons through a verifiable safeguards system that is almost universally subscribed to. We should not forget that at the time of the NPT’s negotiation, it was estimated that by 1975 there could be some twenty nuclear-armed States. This success of the NPT should not be taken for granted.

In addition to the legally binding disarmament commitments under Article VI of the Treaty, the NPT has also functioned as a de facto negotiating forum for nuclear disarmament. It has produced important confidence-building and transparency measures, including an
unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament.

The 2020 NPT Review Conference – marking both the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty’s entry into force and the twenty-fifth anniversary of its indefinite extension – presents both a symbolic and practical opportunity.

It is the perfect occasion to celebrate the NPT’s many achievements and the role that it has played in making the world a safer place.

It is also an opportunity to ensure the Treaty remains the lynchpin of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime and continues to enhance all States parties’ security.

Failure to secure a successful outcome in 2020 will not doom the Treaty or the non-proliferation regime. It will, however, serve to undermine the value so many UN Member States place on it and, in turn, devalue the review cycle as a way to not only strengthen the implementation of the NPT, but the regime as a whole. It could further entrench the divides within the Treaty with long-term ramifications.

Consequently, I continue to encourage all Parties to approach the Review Conference in a spirit of flexibility and with a willingness to engage in real dialogue in order to create an atmosphere conducive to success.

Success at the Review Conference faces many challenges, not least varying definitions of what success entails, but also because of the geopolitical context in which we find ourselves.

We cannot skate over the fact that the world is a very different place than it was in 2015, let alone 2010, the last time a Review Conference produced a forward-looking outcome document.

Relationships between States – especially nuclear-weapon States – are fractured. So-called “great power competition” is the order of the day. Division, distrust and a dearth of dialogue are increasingly the norm.
The specter of unconstrained nuclear competition looms over us for the first time since the 1970s. We are witnessing what has been termed a qualitative nuclear arms race – one not based on numbers but on faster, stealthier and more accurate weapons.

Regional conflicts with a nuclear dimension are worsening, and proliferation challenges are not receding.

Having said that, I do not believe these issues necessarily preclude success at the Review Conference. In fact, I hope that these issues can be discussed constructively and in ways that can move them forward, as part of the full implementation of the Treaty.

In terms of a forward-looking outcome, obviously this will depend on dialogue at the conference itself. However, I think there are several issues that should form a part of any consensus document.

Let me mention some today.

First, a high-level reaffirmation of commitment to the Treaty and to all obligations undertaken as a Party to it. At the half-century mark of the Treaty, this seems fitting.

Second, a recommitment to the norm against the use of the nuclear weapons. The recent growth in rhetoric extolling the utility of nuclear weapons is dangerous and destabilizing. We should return to the logic of President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev: a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought.

Third, development of a package of risk reduction measures that can help take the world away from the prospect of nuclear weapon use and towards nuclear disarmament would be a significant confidence-building measure.

Fourth, States should recognize that challenges to non-proliferation are not static and, therefore, the regime cannot be either. At a minimum, I would hope that States parties are able to endorse the Additional Protocol as the safeguards’ standard.
Fifth, as I noted, we cannot hide from the fact that the world has changed. As the Secretary-General has said on several occasions, this environment requires a new vision for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. I hope the Review Conference can serve as a springboard for thinking on how to address the nuclear weapons challenges of our time.

The current Security Council includes many States who will be key players at the Review Conference. I believe, therefore, a reaffirmation of Council Members’ support for the Treaty and an expression of commitment to securing success in May would provide a significant boost to the Review Conference’s prospects. Given the stake, I hope you will work towards this aim.

I thank you very much for your attention.