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NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: FROM THE METHODIST CENTRAL HALL TO THE IAEA

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First, let me thank David Wardrop for inviting me to give this presentation to you today. This is a topic worthy of the United Nation Association's Westminster Branch.

As you know, we walk on hallowed ground. On 24 January 1946, the newly established United Nations' General Assembly met in the Methodist Central Hall, a little more than 30 minutes away from here by foot. There, it adopted its very first resolution. It resolved to establish a commission to deal with the problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy. It was tasked with making specific proposals for—and I quote—“the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all major weapons adaptable to mass destruction”.

London was scarred, and many areas in ruin. Our great city would not recover for decades. It's 1939 population peak would only be surpassed today, 76 years later. United Nations Delegates would have been reminded of the consequences of war simply by walking out of the Great Hall. The continent itself lay in ruin, Europe was mourning the 70 million lives lost in the Second World War.

I doubt many delegates could have foreseen what would follow in the coming decades. The period since the beginning of the 1950s is sometimes called ‘The Great Acceleration’. The world population doubled in just 50 years. The global economy increased more than 15 times over. The human enterprise has grown exponentially, due to rising consumption, cheap and readily available energy, and liberal economic policies. We are increasingly connected, fuelled by an unsurpassed era of technological discovery. We are richer, healthier, better fed and better educated than ever before in the history of humankind.

But this, of course, does not mean that the problems of our past have gone away. A decennium ago, H.G. Wells wrote in *The World Set Free*: "All through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the amount of energy that men were able to command was continually increasing. Applied to warfare, that meant that the power to inflict a blow, the power to destroy, was continually increasing." He concludes, in a most sobering way, "There was no increase whatever in the ability to escape." A most chilling prediction of the nuclear age.

In May 1950, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman published a simple proposal with great ramifications. "World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it," he wrote, introducing the idea that would later become the European Coal and Steel Community.

To control the production of coal and steel—essential materials for the production of munitions—would “make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.”

I have no doubt that Mr Schuman’s idea applies to nuclear disarmament. It too cannot be propelled without creative efforts proportionate to the challenge of getting to zero.

Last year, the United Nations’ Secretary General remarked that all nuclear material in weapons programmes must be subject one day to binding international verification. He called on all member states to begin the process to elaborate what he called effective arrangements.

How to deal with the disarmament obligations of the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty has always been one of the most contentious issues at Review Conferences. Non-nuclear weapon states have highlighted the lack of progress on this article since 1975. Making the claim that nuclear weapon states are not doing enough is easy: it spends little political capital, it relies on well-rehearsed arguments, and it is part of what’s expected at the conference. Proposals tend to centre on either end of the spectrum, with proponents of the nuclear weapons convention clustered on one side of the debate, and proponents of the step-by-step approach on the other.

Practically-oriented and constructive proposals are rare, as has been pointed out by Reaching Critical Will, a non-governmental organisation. The P5 are making some concessions to the other treaty members on the disarmament front. At the last PrepCom, in May 2014, the five nuclear-weapon states submitted reports on the implementation of the treaty—including disarmament—to date. In part, this stems from an increasing emphasis on transparency that has emerged since the 2010 Review Conference, and which is also reflected in the ‘P5 Process’ discussions on transparency and verification.

In these reports, nearly all the nuclear-weapon states highlighted their recognition of the importance of verification of nuclear disarmament. The UK, for instance, described verification as being a ‘pre-condition’ for nuclear disarmament, while China noted that it had been carrying out research into verification technologies (including monitoring technology for warhead dismantlement processes) that could be applied to the task. The US also reported investment in nuclear disarmament verification technologies, and this has since taken the form of a partnership with the non-governmental organisation NTI.

Speaking at the PrepCom last year, the US noted that it was working to develop ‘effective verification methodologies and processes’ and that its experience with verified bilateral nuclear disarmament provided it with ‘valuable experience and useful tools for multilateral nuclear disarmament approaches in the future.’ To that end, said the US, it was working closely with all the other P5 states ‘to lay the foundations for future arms control agreements with participants beyond Russia and the United States.’

Similarly, although stressing that the focus should be on New START and not ‘new projects’, Russia stated that its efforts in tandem with the US to reduce and limit nuclear weapons were ‘bringing us close to the edge where engagement of all the states with military nuclear potential will be required,’ NPT and non-NPT nuclear-armed states alike.

None of which says anything about who should carry out verification of future agreements, however. Possibly that is less important at this stage—when technical challenges to proper verification of nuclear

disarmament remain so acute. These, after all, are challenges that will need to be overcome by whoever is to carry out verification activities, and technologies and processes deemed suitable for arms control will, broadly speaking, be usable by properly trained inspectors from states and international organisations alike.

However, it appears that openness to the suitability of the IAEA as a disarmament verification authority is growing. It is difficult to judge how much support language on disarmament has in the organisation's General Conference. The annual safeguards resolution sheds some light on the issue, but that language contains many other contentious areas. Whether it passes or not is rarely a matter of disarmament language alone.

In 2011, Brazil asked for an amendment of the resolution to note that 'in furthering the establishment of safeguarded worldwide disarmament, non-proliferation and disarmament efforts, including nuclear verification, are mutually reinforcing.' The language was introduced as an attempt to ensure the withdrawal of objections on a wide range of other paragraphs. Some states voiced support for the language. The United Kingdom was willing to consider it in isolation. The Russian Federation and the United States both felt it was introduced too late, but did not dismiss it as unacceptable. Since the Brazilians did not know whether their proposed language could help pass the resolution as a whole, the General Conference ultimately did not resolve the matter.

Starting in 2012, the resolution has been progressively strengthened. Also, it has enjoyed increasing support. For the past three years, the safeguards resolution contains a preambular paragraph which welcomes "the work the Agency has undertaken in verifying nuclear material from dismantled nuclear weapons."

At the end of the day, disarmament should be verified multilaterally. Here, the International Atomic Energy Agency will play an important role. Involving the Agency in disarmament verification at an early stage makes sound economic sense. The Agency, despite its flaws, and despite what its antagonists may say, represents a natural centre of excellence in most things nuclear, and the only multilateral arms control organisation with more than 200 staff that deals with nuclear verification on a day-to-day basis. It would make little sense to establish a new organisation, under a new Director General, with new staff, in a shiny new expensive headquarter somewhere, to carry out the same tasks as the Agency is carrying out today.

The Agency is also the only forum where both de-jure and de-facto nuclear weapon states come together under one roof. They share that roof with many capable non-nuclear weapon states. The 2010 NPT Review Conference asked us to support cooperation on nuclear disarmament verification in the hope that broader involvement in formulating the rules of verification will lead to broader assurance once the rules are applied. What better place than Vienna to do this work?

Involving the non-nuclear weapon state community is extremely important. At the end of the day, disarmament means making all states non-nuclear and placing all fissile materials under the same system of international account. Everyone, thus, has an equal stake in formulating these rules early on.

Engaging a broader set of states on the technical level will hopefully bring new, and more considered, ideas to the debate. We have found, throughout the course of this project, that it is relatively easy to find people prepared to work on policies relating to nuclear disarmament, but that the community that focuses on practicalities is small outside the nuclear weapon states.

Finally, should nuclear disarmament ever become multilateral, its implementation will, by definition, be a joint undertaking. Increasing capacity in the non-nuclear weapon states will help prepare for that day. And, of course, once capacity has been increased, it would need to be maintained.