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MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT VERIFICATION

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UN Headquarters, New York, 31 October 2018

1. First, allow me to thank the U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs for hosting this event. This is the second year we're back in the First Committee, and I suppose it's a tradition if it happens again next year. Let us aim for that.
2. Now, I'm the Executive Director of VERTIC, where I have been dealing with arms control verification issues for the best part of the last fifteen years. Today, I would like to take ten minutes of your time to talk about capacity-building to deal with the verification of the limitation or the elimination of nuclear weapons. This is a matter of continuing importance.

The risk we are facing

3. For two years' running, the Global Risks Report has listed Weapons of Mass Destruction as the number one risk facing the world when it comes to its consequence. To quote the report, there is "uncertainty about the strength of the norms created by decades of work to prevent nuclear conflict." This is a very concerning statement by some of the most leading thinkers on risks and their management.
4. How do you deal with a threat of this magnitude? Well, you build capacity to handle it, both concerning prevention and mitigation. To take an unrelated example, if you are concerned about rising sea levels and flooding, you may think that a sea-wall is a great idea. However, no matter how hard you think about your wall, it's not going to happen until someone builds it. Constructing a wall requires capital and resource, but above all labour and know-how: capacity.

Capacity building is key...

5. So, if you consider that weapons of mass destruction are a significant threat facing humankind, you would want to prepare to eliminate or mitigate that threat. If you then believe that weapons will have to be verifiably reduced or removed, you'll have to prepare systems and processes for effective verification. Key to this is the need to build

capacity to do all this. We need to move away from just *thinking about* our sea-wall. We need to start learning how to build it.

6. *However, we are not building capacity; we pretend we do!*
7. For example, let us contemplate on the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification. It is a worthwhile effort, and what I'm about to say is not a reflection on its value.
8. It has engaged a full range of European actors, and I think it is examining essential matters. It is important to recognise that it is the first of its kind. I'm not saying that it is meaningless and that it should cease its activities. However, the concept of running a closed collaborative group like this has drawbacks.
9. In last year's consultation on a Group of Scientific Experts, a BRICS participant said that it is mostly a transatlantic affair, with little input from the developing world, and virtually no input from the United Nations or its associated agencies. Another, WEOG participant, said that his country was unable to deal with new proposals, such as a Group of Scientific Experts, as he could not assign to such initiatives. The IPNDV and other commitments had stretched his team to the limit.

...but it has to be done right.

10. Capacity depletion can never be capacity building. The idea of any new proposal, such as that contained in Brazil's Working Paper, should be to grow the number of experts in the field, while at the same time deepening everyone's understanding of the intricacies of nuclear arms control.
11. Arguments that relate to the '*slice of the cake*'—how to divvy up the present availability of experts or the present scarcity of funding—does not impress me. They are predictable, unconstructive, and frankly dull. Arguments that refers to the '*size of the cake*'—how to grow the number of experts, how to grow the level of funding, how to grow the level of understanding—now, they do impress me.

Our objectives:

12. This is why VERTIC, over the next three years intend to engage with a select group of governments to get to the bottom of their needs, should they want to engage in nuclear disarmament verification. We hope to be part of building real and sustainable capacity in these countries to be part of the verification debate.
13. Our first objective will be to assess the capabilities of four governments to contribute effectively to multilateral efforts aimed at strengthening disarmament verification. We will work with local partners—universities and research centres—to do a thorough

assessment of the local knowledge base, looking at what is already there, and at what could become.

14. We also hope to work closely with the relevant governments, making sure that what we propose fits their broader vision of how their country could contribute, should enough funding and support be available to them.
15. Based on this initial assessment, our second objective will be to identify, assemble and make functional three expert hubs. These hubs are not likely to be large: they are intended to be seeds. The idea is to use these to expand on the national roster of experts involved, and to grow the base over time. We hope to build centres able to maintain the host government's financial and political support over an extended period.
16. The presence of national centres matter. I once lectured at a CTBTO capacity building course, and a colleague from Namibia told us how his country's ratification of the test-ban treaty had started an entire university department, now vibrant, well funded and supported.
17. The third objective will be to propose a process in which these three nodes can link up and share their work. Today's digital tools of science have created a Global Temple of Knowledge where, to quote EU Commissioner Moedas, "60 million practising scientists can easily cooperate on any given topic, in real time, across disciplines and across the globe."¹
18. VERTIC was founded 32 years ago. It borrowed its mission, and many of its statements, from the Ronald Reagan administration. It's built much of its life around the concept of applying science and technology for good.
19. Three years before we were founded, President Reagan called, in his famous SDI speech, "upon the scientific community in our country, those who gave us nuclear weapons, to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete." While President Reagan was referring to the United States' sprawling laboratory complex, his basic idea on the value of scientific engagement have resonance.
20. After all, why should we not use international networks and modern technology to make sure that we tap the best of the best, the intellectual elite, irrespective of where in the world they work and live? The Brazilian Working Paper lays a good foundation for this, while at the same time respecting the national security concerns of some nuclear-armed states.

¹ Moedas, Carlos. "Science Diplomacy as a Driver of Excellence." European Commission. October 27, 2016. Accessed October 31, 2018. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/moedas/announcements/science-diplomacy-driver-excellence_en.

Can science heal divisions?

21. Technical collaboration may help mitigate some of the divisions we see in the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament community today.
22. The dream of a world free of nuclear weapons is hardly new. In President Reagan's 1984 State of the Union, he posed a question to the Soviet Union: "The only value in our two nations possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used," he said, "But then," he continued, "would it not be better to do away with them entirely?"
23. His question is yet unanswered, which has spawned initiatives such as the Nuclear Ban Treaty. In my mind, this treaty is not the undoing of the Nonproliferation Regime, neither is it the starting point of global abolition. Something else is required for that to happen. However, the Ban Treaty is symptomatic of a bigger problem. Frustration and a belief that not enough is being done.
24. When VERTIC helped start the UK-Norway Initiative some ten years ago, we helped to show an alternative way. One where scientific and technical collaboration captures the centre stage. We should build on that vision. To paraphrase EU Commissioner Moedas, "scientific collaboration help us make better decisions in dealing with a major issue in today's global politics." That's the singular value and purpose of such exchanges.
25. Ultimately, scientific collaboration will not make any decisions. Deciding on abolition is the purview of other men and women: and it is clear that some of those will listen to scientific and technical advice, and some will not. That's on them. It's their decision, not ours, and not the scientists.

What then, United Nations?

26. States in the Group of Governmental Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification should carefully consider Brazil's proposal. States which are not should inquire about it, and lend it their support.
27. In today's environment of 'alternative facts' and 'fake information,' I hope you'll agree with me that aspiring to build a fact-based view of the problems facing us, and fostering a culture of information-driven decision making, has started to become a collective responsibility.
28. I thank you for your time.