



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - Geneva

Conference on Disarmament

Statement delivered by Amb. Leonardo Bencini, Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament

Geneva, 9 February 2023

Mister President,

Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Let me add some remarks in my national capacity.

Mister President,

Italy remains convinced that the best approach towards nuclear disarmament remains enshrined in the framework of art VI of the NPT, which provides in our view the only realistic legal framework to attain a world without nuclear weapons in a way that promotes international stability on the principle of undiminished security for all.

Our approach is based on the idea that the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world can only be reached gradually, implying the involvement of all relevant actors and through a series of concrete and progressive steps, leading to effective, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament. In this framework, nuclear-weapon States have fundamental responsibilities for the implementation of disarmament efforts. At the same time, the NPT provides the basis for working together on key elements to achieve common goals.

Bearing this in mind, Italy believes that Negative Security Assurances could constitute a pertinent and relevant step in the right direction, as they have an important role to play in advancing both global and regional security, specifically through their contribution towards the goal of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as set out in the NPT.

For nuclear-weapon States, Negative Security Assurances lead to a de facto reduction of possible targets, with a progressively more marginal role of nuclear arsenals in national and collective defence postures and doctrines.

For non-nuclear-weapon States, the assurance that nuclear-weapon ones will not use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against them provides further confidence in the non-proliferation regime. As such, it constitutes an incentive not to pursue the development or acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Italy recognizes the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States in receiving unequivocal, legally-binding assurances from all nuclear-weapon States. The full implementation of existing NSAs, therefore, is key. In this regard, however, I would like to underline two fundamental aspects.

First, we believe that negative assurances may be fully applied only to States that respect their non-proliferation obligations. In this respect, the membership in and full compliance with the NPT remains fundamental.

Second, while contributing to nuclear disarmament, NSAs should be considered as an interim step towards it. Our shared goal remains a world free of nuclear weapons and this should continue to be pursued in the framework of a progressive approach, focusing on effective measures, in accordance with Article VI of the NPT.

However, NSAs should not be seen in isolation, but as an essential component to other initiatives such as the commencement of negotiations of a Treaty dealing with fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices; the prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; and the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

On this last point, we encourage all nuclear-weapon States to sign and ratify the relevant Protocols providing security assurances to States members of nuclear-weapon-free zones.

We also reiterate our commitment towards the establishment of a Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East, on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at by all States of the region.

Mister President,

We are extremely concerned by the effect on NSAs of the military aggression of Russia, a nuclear-weapon State, against Ukraine, a non-nuclear-weapon State. This is not only a flagrant violation of the UN charter and of international law but also of the very obligations and security assurances undertaken by the Russian Federation.

This war must stop immediately and all occupied territories must be returned to Ukraine, in compliance with the 1994 Budapest memorandum.

To conclude, Mister President,

In Italy's view, there is room for going beyond the full implementation of existing NSAs and for exploring ways to strengthen them. The CD has a significant role to play and could give a decisive contribution to this debate, especially within the context of an agreed, comprehensive and balanced programme of work.

Italy supports its continued engagement on this issue, with a view to elaborating recommendations dealing with all its aspects, not excluding an internationally legally binding instrument.