

Open-ended working group on taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations

Closing statement by Wildfire>, 13 May 2016

As we reach the conclusion of this session, and the end of substantive discussion in the open-ended working group, it is a good time to reflect on how far we have come in meeting the mandate of this group, that is, to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. How can we assess our progress?

Early in this session, we heard from a survivor of the Hiroshima bombing, Setsuko Thurlow, who 71 years later still hears the voices of her 13-year-old classmates, calling for help as they burned to death, trapped in the rubble of their classroom. My measure for progress is this: can we look Setsuko Thurlow in the eye and say: “we did everything we could”?

I think Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Zambia and the other sponsors of WP.34 can say that. I think Austria, Egypt, Jamaica and the other states that have supported the recommendations of WP.34 can say that. I think the 33 member states of CELAC and the 54 member states of the African Group can say that. And I think that, provided they make good on their undertakings, the 126 sponsors of WP.36 will soon be able to say that.

Can the supporters of the so-called “progressive approach” say that? Really? After all we have heard over the past three years on the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons, after all your expressions of concern at the status quo and your claimed “commitment” to a world free of nuclear weapons, was it really the best you could do to propose the same measures you have proposed for 20 years? Was it the best you could do at this meeting to read the same statement five times, to propose the same measures you have proposed for 20 years? Now I’m sure all your proposals will end up in the working group report; after all they have been agreed many times before. But could you really look Setsuko Thurlow in the eye and say you did *everything* you could? Could you?

I don’t think so.

You may ask, what else could we do? You might say, I’m only the first secretary, or the counsellor, or the ambassador – a small cog in the national bureaucracy. But it starts with you. And it’s not that hard. We don’t expect miracles. All we want from you is honesty.

You don’t oppose the ban because it will undermine the NPT. You don’t oppose the ban because it will be ineffective. You don’t oppose it because it will be divisive, or because it will accelerate global warming, or stunt your growth, or make you blind, or any of the other rather implausible pretexts we’ve heard in the course of this meeting.

You oppose a treaty banning nuclear weapons because it will make it more difficult for you to maintain your dependence on nuclear weapons. As the ban comes closer, that fact has become more and more obvious. The debate yesterday removed any lingering

doubt: we heard, from several non-nuclear-weapon states parties to the NPT, unambiguous expressions of their *need* for nuclear weapons for defence.

It's time for you to face this, to own this, and to engage honestly with the large majority of states that are moving ahead to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear weapons. You need to begin honest discussions – domestically and internationally – on how you will engage in this process, and what it will mean for your policies, your alliance relationships, and your future. And we will help you. We know this will be a challenging time, but I think you will find that once you engage honestly – and are open and frank about your situation, constraints and motivations – the large majority of the world's countries that have embraced the humanitarian pledge will embrace you, and will work constructively with you to find the best way to move forward together with a treaty banning nuclear weapons.
