

NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL: THE ROAD AHEAD

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In the history of nuclear arms control, nuclear-weapon-free zones stand out as a hallmark — a testament to what can be achieved by nations banding together to achieve common nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament objectives.

The world's first nuclear-weapon-free zone in an inhabited part of the world was established by the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean under the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco. Nuclear-weapon-free zones have since been established in the South Pacific, in Southeast Asia and in Central Asia. The Pelindaba Treaty establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Africa was signed in 1996 but it is not yet in force. In September 1992, President Punsalmaagin Ochirbat of Mongolia declared that henceforth Mongolia's national territory would have nuclear-weapon-free status. This initiative was welcomed by the nuclear-weapon States, including Mongolia's two immediate neighbours, China and Russia, as well as by non-nuclear-weapon States.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones provide tangible security benefits. They contribute to non-proliferation by building confidence between countries within a particular region. The IAEA has an important part to play. In addition to its verification activities under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Agency also has a recognized role in verifying compliance with nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties.

A number of challenges must be addressed, however, as we look towards a world free from nuclear weapons.

On the disarmament front, despite repeated 'unequivocal' commitments by the nuclear-weapon States to move toward nuclear disarmament, little meaningful progress has been made in recent years. There are still 27 000 nuclear weapons in existence.

The IAEA safeguards system also needs to be strengthened. Out of 185 non-nuclear-weapon States party to the NPT, 27 remain without a comprehensive safeguards agreement in force and around 100 States still have to conclude additional protocols, which enable the Agency to provide assurances about possible undeclared nuclear activities.

Clearly, we must strengthen the larger framework for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. For some years now, I have been advocating limiting the processing of weapon-usable material (separated plutonium and high enriched uranium) in civilian nuclear programmes — as well as the production of new material through reprocessing and enrichment — by restricting these operations exclusively to facilities under multinational control. These limitations would need to be accompanied by appropriate rules on assurance of supply of nuclear fuel for legitimate would-be users. We should also give consideration to adopting multinational approaches to the management and disposal of spent fuel and radioactive waste. Considerable economic, safety, security and non-proliferation advantages would be gained from international co-operation in these stages of the nuclear fuel cycle.

We must also move to ‘turn off the tap’ on the production of new material for nuclear weapons by concluding a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. A global verifiable FMCT is vital, not only in the context of advancing nuclear disarmament, but also for arresting the potential for nuclear proliferation.

Nuclear terrorism is the greatest threat we face. I believe the IAEA’s nuclear security standards, aimed at effectively securing nuclear and other radioactive materials, should be made binding to help reduce the risk.

The world needs a new system for collective security, which must be equitable, inclusive and effective. It must take into account the concerns of all States and must be able to respond promptly to emerging threats. And it must not rely on nuclear deterrence.

I am greatly encouraged by the Joint Statement of President Medvedev and President Obama earlier this month, in which they committed themselves through concrete steps to fulfill their obligations under the NPT to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world. The commitment of the two Presidents to pursue new and verifiable reductions of their strategic offensive arsenals; the achievement of the long awaited entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty; the negotiation of a verifiable Treaty to end the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and the strengthening of efforts to secure nuclear weapons and material demonstrates leadership and finally moves us beyond the Cold War mentality.

Over the past four decades, the contributions to international security made by the NPT and nuclear-weapon-free-zone treaties have been substantial. I urge States in these nuclear-weapon-free zones to continue to set an example for other regions.

I wish participants in the meeting of representatives of focal points of nuclear-weapon-free zones in Ulaanbaatar every success in their deliberations.