Ashley Christ Remarks for Disarmament Education Panel in CD
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Madame President and distinguished delegates of the Conference on Disarmament. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on this important topic. Disarmament education benefits not only participants but also the international community by training a pipeline of experts to address the most vexing problems of tomorrow. This will remain critical if we are to manage the complex security challenges of new technologies developing before our eyes.

I have interacted with many of you in my role as a member of the U.S. delegation to this body, but I share my thoughts today as a young professional who has recently benefitted from disarmament education programs including fellowships and training. My perspective comes primarily through my participation in three such programs: the Project on Nuclear Initiative at the Center on Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); the Accelerator Initiative at the Stanley Center for Peace and Security; and a safeguards course for students and professionals through the U.S. Department of Energy. This list represents only a small number of disarmament focused programs available, but this sample can demonstrate the contribution of disarmament education writ large. As I see it, these programs shape young professionals like me in four ways. First, they train the rising generation to perform high quality analytical research on pressing nuclear issues. Second, they facilitate knowledge transfer between generations of practitioners. Third, they bridge the gap between policy and technical experts. And fourth, they can target underrepresented groups to build a diverse pipeline of nuclear experts.

To illustrate the concrete contributions of disarmament education to the cause of international security, I will share some highlights from my own experience. The first is regarding the opportunity for young professionals to perform original research. Programs like the CSIS Nuclear Scholars Initiative provide fellows not only a platform in which to publish, but also access to senior experts in the field who otherwise would be out of reach. As part of the program, I am researching policy options to strengthen the norm against attacks on nuclear facilities and have dug into the UN's historical records to assess the diplomatic work that has been done on this topic to date. It had taught me to recognize how proceedings from the past can illuminate policy options today, and it has provided an invaluable platform to receive feedback and guidance from senior professionals. The opportunity to publish has driven me to perform deep research that many of us would like to do when approaching our work in CD, but we often lack the bandwidth. In sum, offering young professionals the resources to think deeply about these issues helps us develop the knowledge and confidence to act as leaders on substantive issues and infuse fresh thinking into what can become a tired debate.

This leads naturally to the second key contribution of disarmament education, which is transferring knowledge between generations. I do not just mean formal teaching, but even more importantly, the informal teaching through sharing stories of firsthand experiences. I had a truly formative experience with this kind of informal knowledge transfer as a fellow with the Stanley Center for Peace and Security, a U.S. based foundation that focuses in part on advancing policy solutions to reduce nuclear risks. The Center recently hosted an event that

elevated first-person experiences with risk reduction for discussion between practitioners and early career experts. In practice, this meant hearing firsthand accounts about implementing cooperative threat reduction projects between the United States and Russia. It meant hearing how practitioners navigated cultural protocols while implementing anti-nuclear smuggling projects in Mongolia. It meant learning about the hurdles of negotiating a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone beyond what is captured in any NPT final document. These were lessons that could not be taught in a policy memo or a textbook. They were how real people navigated real situations to find pragmatic solutions. This kind of informal learning is essential for young practitioners like me to understand the nuances of what made cooperation possible in the past as well as the delicate diplomacy needed to implement policies agreed in capitals. Understanding the cooperation possible in past eras helps the rising generation remain optimistic and continue seeking progress in disarmament fora despite setbacks. This type of informal learning happens all the time on the sidelines of disarmament education settings in a way that is not possible in hierarchical work structures.

The third key contribution of disarmament education is bridging the gap between policy and technical experts. As a graduate student, I participated in an intensive two-week workshop on international nuclear safeguards with a mix of policy and technical experts. To spell it out more clearly, I was a policy practitioner in a room half filled with nuclear engineers and physicists. At times, I would suggest policy approaches that that the technical experts would question, and vice versa. I participated in a mock safeguards inspection and learned about the practical challenges of safeguards implementation and the implications of various technical

developments. Through this exchange, the policy practitioners like me became better prepared to integrate technical considerations into their work, and I hope the technical experts were able to do the same. This made me a more effective practitioner in my work as a safeguards specialist prior to joining the CD.

Fourth, disarmament education helps prepare a diverse set of professionals to be leaders on nuclear issues. While gender is only one piece of the diversity puzzle, many delegations agreed here last week that targeted efforts to engage women earlier in the pipeline are essential to ensure their full and meaningful participation in disarmament bodies. This is the goal of the Stanley Center's Accelerator Initiative, which offers early career women in the nuclear field mentorship and professional development resources. Through this program I developed an invaluable professional relationship with former high-ranking woman at the International Atomic Energy Agency. We discussed not only our ideas on substantive safeguards topics, like how emerging technologies could help strengthen verification regimes, but also more human topics like how she navigated gender expectations when developing safeguards protocols with a culturally diverse set of countries. These types of targeted programs are how the international community can transform the nuclear field into an inclusive space fit for the 21st century.

Drafted by Ashley Christ

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