

Group of Scientific and Technical Experts on Nuclear Disarmament Verification Joint submission by Brazil and Norway

A. BACKGROUND

The 79th Session of the UN General Assembly adopted almost consensually resolution A/79/240 on a Group of Scientific and Technical Experts on nuclear disarmament verification (GSTE-NDV) submitted by Brazil and Norway. Built on the work of the two Groups of Governmental Experts on nuclear disarmament verification¹ and relevant resolutions from UNGA², the resolution mandated the UN Secretary-General “to seek the view of Member States, in writing, on the establishment of the GSTE” and to “convene three in-person informal meetings on the topic, two of which should be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and one at the United Nations Office in Geneva”.

The rationale behind Brazil's and Norway's initiative was their persuasion that a GSTE-NDV would provide unique practical benefits in support of the long-term goal of nuclear disarmament. A GSTE-NDV would enable States to work collaboratively on NDV in a multilateral setting. Future nuclear disarmament arrangements will need to be underpinned by effective verification to ensure its long-term sustainability, both in reaching and then maintaining a world free of nuclear weapons.

The more States that get involved with work on disarmament verification, the better prepared all States would be for future negotiations, and the more effective the relevant technologies, methodologies and procedures will be. Capacity building is therefore central to the work on nuclear disarmament verification. Importantly, verification should never be used as an excuse for not progressing disarmament. If there is political will, such progress can be found.

The continuous erosion of world's nuclear security architecture and the protracted stalemate in the nuclear disarmament agenda only make collaboration around NDV all the more relevant and important. Convergences are most necessary in strife-ridden times. And NDV is admittedly one of the few areas that can allow for advances without any compromise on core principles of disarmament.

It should be noted that in the past decades various initiatives, bilateral and pluryilateral, have provided a rich pool of knowledge on NDV. In Brazil's and Norway's assessment, a GSTE under the UN auspices could give it multilateral credence, so that it can be drawn on to future disarmament negotiations.

B. PROPOSAL: Objectives, modality and mandate of a GSTE-NDV

With reference to resolution 79/240, Brazil and Norway propose the following shared ideas on the objectives, modalities and mandate for a GSTE-NDV:

¹ A/74/90; A/78/120

² A/71/67; A/74/50; A/78/239

Objectives

The GSTE-NDV would aim to a) consider technical challenges in NDV in terms of tools, techniques, processes and procedures; b) appraise knowledge on NDV, derived from past and ongoing initiatives on NDV or related areas; c) enable States to participate in technical NDV discussions on a voluntary basis d) incorporate and preserve knowledge on NDV within the UN system and provide assurance to the international community that States are focused on this matter.

Modality

The GSTE-NDV will be a UN instance. Its work will be deliberative, focussing on scientific and technical exchanges that enhance knowledge of NDV options and their benefits and challenges.

The GSTE-NDV could have a panel format, whose reports will be submitted to all bodies that constitute the UN disarmament machinery.

It will be composed of 20 to 25 experts from both nuclear weapon possessing States and those who do not possess such weapons, in a voluntary manner. They will be selected on the basis of their scientific expertise, equitable geographical representation and gender balance.

The Group can meet annually for two one-week sessions. The location of the biannual meetings would be based on a rotating system among the cities hosting the main disarmament fora, namely Geneva, New York and Vienna.

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) can provide the secretariat for the Group and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) can provide technical assistance. The working language of the sessions would be English and no translation services would be provided in an effort to reduce the budgetary burden of the meetings.

Mandate

The GSTE-NDV's deliberations will be not legally-binding. It will not be tasked to negotiate any treaty on nuclear disarmament, nor would its establishment imply any commitment that negotiations might follow or prejudice their possible outcome.

The following areas in the field of NDV should be considered for the mandate of the GSTE:

1. Declarations, including initial and progress declarations;
2. Removal of deployed nuclear warheads;
3. Dismantlement and storage of warhead components;
4. Conversion of nuclear material with classified characteristics;
5. The elimination or irreversible conversion of all nuclear-weapon-related facilities;
6. Placement of nuclear material and facilities under international safeguards;

7. Verification of the correctness and completeness of the baseline declarations of nuclear material once the State concerned declares that it no longer possesses nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices; and,
 8. Delivery vehicles of nuclear weapons.
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