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General Debate

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Statement by Portugal
Delivered by H.E. Mr. Rui Vinhas,
Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations

Chair,

Portugal aligns with the EU statement, but would like to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

Allow me to start by congratulating you and the other members of the bureau on your election. You can count on our cooperation to help make this session fruitful and as consensual as possible.

Portugal wishes to underline three points.

First, our collective diagnosis of the disarmament and non-proliferation landscape must be balanced.

It is easy to be defeatist and pessimistic when trust between countries seems to be eroding, and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric seems to be on the rise.

After all, only a few months ago, we were unfortunately unable to agree on an outcome during the NPT Review Conference.

But there are also good news that we often forget about.

On the diplomatic front, this year, there have been at least three important agreements. Here in New York, during BMS9, we agreed on an outcome on small arms and light weapons. In Laos, we agreed on an outcome on cluster munitions. And in Geneva, we agreed on an outcome on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Furthermore, from the beginning of this year, we also reached an important milestone: this is longest period without a nuclear test explosion since the dawn of the atomic era.

To be clear, we acknowledge that the challenges to the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture are real, serious and complex, but the international community should not minimize the positive developments, which may inspire us to work harder and cooperate more.

Second, international security is best sustained by international law and multilateral diplomacy, rather than the law of force.

Every country – large or small – benefits from the rules-based order. Every country – large or small – is less safe when fragmentation becomes the norm.

So when challenges emerge, when obligations related to disarmament and non-proliferation are not respected, the law is our best safeguard.

This is why Portugal has consistently called for the entry into force of the CTBT and the start of negotiations, by the Conference on Disarmament, on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The increasing challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence and the progress made in Geneva by the Group of Governmental Experts should also impel the international community to consider the adoption of a treaty on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems.

And where binding treaties or voluntary norms are already in place, implementation, verification and monitoring are key.

This is why we remain deeply attached to the independent and impartial work carried out by international agencies such as the IAEA or the CTBTO.

Third, while many arms control challenges are longstanding, the disarmament machinery must be forward-looking, modern and fit-for-purpose.

Our discussions cannot shy away from the impact that new and emerging technologies are already having on the military domain.

Whether we talk about uncrewed systems like armed drones, about genetic engineering or synthetic biology, about 3D printing of small weapons or

ammunitions, about electromagnetic devices for warfare or the protection of undersea cables, it is undeniable that the threat landscape is changing.

And while multilateral negotiations must remain intergovernmental, we must adapt our institutions to obtain greater input and expertise from the private sector and academia, for example in the Global Mechanism on Cybersecurity.

Greater rationalization efforts and synergies between the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission are essential in making the system function more efficiently.

Chair,

To conclude, Portugal hopes that, in this Committee session, we set our differences apart, overcome polarization and recommit to a collective security system based on international law and multilateral diplomacy.

In our view, this is the best way to ensuring that the arms control agenda remains relevant, with the ultimate goal of making our countries safer.

Thank you.

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