CONTRIBUTION OF THE HOLY SEE
to the

THE TREATY ON THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
WORKING GROUP ON FURTHER STRENGTHENING
THE REVIEW PROCESS OF THE TREATY

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FOSTERING TRUST, DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION
FOR INTEGRAL DISARMAMENT
The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) recognizes the potential devastation that nuclear war would inflict upon humanity and the need “to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples.” In the Treaty’s Preamble, States Parties of the NPT expressed a desire “to further the easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between States”, with the aim of halting the creation of more nuclear weapons, liquidating existing stockpiles and eliminating their delivery vehicles “under strict and effective international control.”

Such a desire followed the call of Pope Saint John XXIII for disarmament, which in 1963 recognized the necessity “that the fundamental principles upon which peace is based in today’s world be replaced by [...] the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust.” To build such trust, “relations between States, as between individuals, must be regulated not by armed force, but in accordance with the principles of right reason: the principles, that is, of truth, justice and vigorous and sincere co-operation.”

As States Parties of the NPT gather in Vienna as a Working Group, they should reflect upon how a proper application of these principles can contribute to the fostering of genuine dialogue within the context of the Treaty’s Review Process, which plays an indispensable role in both documenting past and guiding future implementation of Treaty provisions.

Since the establishment of the Strengthened Review Process, implementation of provisions across the Treaty’s three pillars has proceeded unevenly, with progress particularly impeded under the disarmament pillar. This Working Group should endeavor to develop measures that would better foster dialogue, with the goal of building trust, guided by the common objectives that are enshrined in the Preamble of the NPT itself. To do so, the Review Process must generate dialogue “that is truly directed to the common good and not to the protection of veiled or particular interests”. In the face of rising global tensions, instability and conflicts that Pope Francis defined as a third world war fought piecemeal, dialogue becomes a greater challenge, requiring all States Parties to remember that “to dialogue means to believe that the ‘other’ has something worthwhile to say, and to entertain his or her point of view and perspective”. It is only through genuine encounter that States can hope to overcome seemingly insurmountable differences within the context of the Treaty.

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1 Cf. Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Preamble.
3 Ibidem, 114.
5 Pope Francis, Message for the 48th World Communications Day: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter, 1 June 2014.
THREE PRINCIPLES

TRUTH

As Pope Francis writes in his Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti, “we no longer have use for empty diplomacy, dissimulation, double-speak, hidden agendas and good manners that mask reality”.6 In their place, truth must reign and form the basis upon which all States Parties can “make a broad and persevering effort to understand one another and to strive for a new synthesis for the good of all”.7 Properly promoting truth within the Treaty’s Review Process necessitates increased transparency among all States—especially nuclear-weapon States—and measures to improve the continuity of Preparatory Committee Meetings.

Regarding improved transparency, the Treaty’s Review Process would benefit from more precise standardized reporting from nuclear-weapon States. In this regard, building upon Action 21 of the 2010 Action Plan,8 States Parties could benefit from the availability of national reports from nuclear-weapon States in advance of Review Conferences, in order to allow other States Parties adequate time to review such submissions. Renewed reporting could include greater transparency regarding the number, type and status of nuclear warheads, as well as plans for qualitative improvement, quantitative expansion or reduction of warheads, doctrinal and operational readiness changes and data on the amount of stockpiled fissile material. Providing such information would offer a common basis upon which States Parties can review implementation of Article VI of the Treaty.

Regarding improved continuity of the Preparatory Committee process, the use of a running negotiated text would help alleviate, though would not eliminate, the tendency for each Preparatory Committee and Review Conference to repeat the same debates, rather than narrowly focusing on areas of divergence. Currently, such focus is largely absent until the latter weeks of Review Conferences, leaving little time to discuss such divergences in depth. Under a reformed Strengthened Review Process, the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee could focus on setting an agenda for the proceeding two meetings, as well as the Review Conference. This, combined with a running text, would help States Parties move away from speaking at one another towards an atmosphere of listening and dialogue on specific issues.

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7 Ibidem.
8 “As a confidence-building measure, all the nuclear-weapon States are encouraged to agree as soon as possible on a standard reporting form and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily providing standard information without prejudice to national security. The Secretary-General of the United Nations is invited to establish a publicly accessible repository, which shall include the information provided by the nuclear-weapon States.”
JUSTICE

Justice means to give one his or her due. In the context of the Treaty’s Review Process, this has multiple dimensions. First, justice involves all States Parties—especially the nuclear-weapon States—faithfully fulfilling their respective obligations under the Treaty and commitments undertaken in consensus outcome documents. Second, justice entails making use of the resources of States Parties in a way that best fosters dialogue and builds trust. To approach these ends, States Parties must consider measures that improve accountability within the Review Process.

Despite the achievement of consensus at the 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences, many commitments undertaken by States Parties remain unfulfilled. This situation warrants increased accountability measures that ensure that the fulfillment of commitments is objectively and accurately tracked. Most concretely, this can be achieved by the development of a document that assesses progress made towards various consensus commitments. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) could produce such a document. Alternatively, States Parties could entrust the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) to carry out this work. While measuring the fulfilment of commitments would not necessarily increase adherence to them, it could help set an objective basis from which to assess progress made as well as areas that still need more effective implementation, fostering more fruitful dialogue among delegations.

VIGOROUS AND SINCERE COOPERATION

As Pope Francis has observed, “growing interdependence and globalization mean that any response to the threat of nuclear weapons should be collective and concerted, based on mutual trust.”9 In formulating such a process, States Parties must ensure that all relevant stakeholders are included in dialogue, taking into consideration also the involvement of those communities affected by the use and testing of nuclear weapons.

To achieve this, States Parties must consider efforts to improve coordination among themselves and the United Nations Secretariat. Efforts undertaken thus far, such as the nomination of focal points for the Treaty to replace the current political group coordinator system, are welcome, yet should go further. Similar to the administration of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the Office of Disarmament Affairs should undertake to make better use of existing systems, such as e-Delegate, to distribute decisions, working papers and other official documents during the Preparatory Committees, Review Conferences and informal consultations held intersessionally.

States Parties could further improve coordination through the early appointment of a bureau for each Review Cycle, consisting of the three Preparatory Committee Chairs, the President of the Review Conference and Chairs for three subsidiary bodies. Putting in

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place such a bureau by the end of the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee would help improve coordination across meetings and would create a central body that could convene ad hoc, informal intersessional meetings when required for administrative purposes.

Nevertheless, making the Review Process more effective goes beyond simply improving the ability of designated officials to coordinate administrative matters.

It also entails a sincere commitment from States Parties to achieve the common objectives and fulfil the solemn obligations undertaken under the NPT. Confronted with current conflicts and instability, as said before, this requires more than ever “the realization that true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments but only in mutual trust.”

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