



**ADDRESS TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT  
HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT BY**

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade,  
Mr. Simon Coveney T.D.**

**Geneva, 25 February 2019**

*Check against delivery*

Mr. President, Secretary General Guterres, Excellencies, it is an honour to be here in Geneva today to have the opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament.

Geneva is recognised the world over as the city of peace and humanitarian action; a city where the diplomatic resolution of the world's most challenging issues are tackled daily; and where multilateralism offers us a means of preventing future conflict.

2019 represents an historic year for multilateralism. It is 100 years since the formation of the League of Nations, when the international community first came together to recognise the necessity of collective dialogue and cooperation. Given the global challenges we face today, this approach is needed more than ever.

For the first time since the Cold War, disarmament and non-proliferation issues have returned to daily headlines. Issues such as the repeated incidents of chemical weapons use; the unacceptable humanitarian and development consequences of increasing use of explosive weapons in populated areas; and, most worryingly, the growing threat posed to humanity by nuclear weapons, demand our attention. Disarmament diplomacy has a key role to play in addressing these challenges.

However, in recent years, we have witnessed the creeping erosion of the rules-based international order, a rollback on commitments previously undertaken and the failure of multilateral forums to fulfil their work due to growing polarisation.

Regretfully, the Conference on Disarmament has, in many respects, come to represent the malaise that is effecting the traditional disarmament and non-proliferation machinery. The inability to adopt a programme of work or reach agreement on new membership applications in over twenty years, indeed, ever since Ireland has been a member of this body, is not sustainable.

Growing geopolitical divisions must not allow us to forget that no individual state can address today's threats in isolation. As W. T. Cosgrave, the first leader of a newly independent Ireland, said during his inaugural address here in Geneva, we all 'reach a much fuller liberty and a much fuller dignity in the harmonious society of nations'.

Mr. President, the potential for multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation to confront global challenges should be seen as a precious opportunity. That is why Ireland warmly welcomes Secretary General Guterres' Agenda for Disarmament. His goal of restoring disarmament to its central role in building international peace and security, as well

as helping to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, is fully shared by Ireland.

The Agenda recognises that disarmament is more than a security issue. For Ireland, it is cross cutting and has relevance across a broad spectrum of multilateral issues, including international development, the environment and cultural heritage. Ireland is working to bring the horizontal issue of gender and disarmament to the fore in international disarmament negotiations, both in terms of the gendered impact of conventional and nuclear weapons and the need to ensure greater agency for women in all disarmament-related discussions and negotiations. It is particularly welcome that the Agenda focuses on this important issue.

*Humanity is, after all, at the centre of all our efforts on disarmament.*

As concrete manifestation of Ireland's support, I am pleased to announce that Ireland will act as a Champion for three of the Actions outlined in the Agenda. These include Facilitating Dialogue for Nuclear Disarmament; Moving forward international efforts to develop a political declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas; and to build understanding on the impact of arms on conflict management.

Ireland looks forward to working with UNODA and all Member States of the UN to make progress on implementation of the Agenda.

The urgency of the issues we confront today cannot be understated. Agreements are unravelling or are being undermined. We face the possibility of a new arms race; the development of new weapons that could lower the threshold for use of nuclear weapons; and modernisation programmes that take us further away from the promise of nuclear disarmament enshrined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The last multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty negotiated in this room, the CTBT, has yet to enter into force and a long-promised Treaty banning the production of fissile material has yet to be negotiated.

Some states have argued that the deteriorating international security environment means that progress on disarmament cannot be made; that we must wait until the time is right. But multilateral disarmament is not a luxury. It is a necessity whose urgency grows as prospects for peace and security diminish.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is a case in point. Introduced by Ireland during the height of the Cold War, when the accepted wisdom was that the number of nuclear armed states would grow rapidly and exponentially, the NPT represents what is possible through effective multilateralism. It represents a recognition that increased security for one state does not have to come at the cost of the security of others. It represents that all states, regardless of size, have a stake in global disarmament and can play their part.

The 2020 Review Conference will mark 50 years since the entry into force of the Treaty. It will be an opportunity for *all* States parties to reflect on what has been achieved and look forward to what remains to be done. As we enter this critical stage of the NPT review cycle, Ireland will work with its partners in the European Union, the New Agenda Coalition and the Vienna Group of Ten to ensure a successful outcome. For Ireland, there can be absolutely no rollback on the commitments contained in the NPT or undertaken at previous Review Conferences and we will strive for meaningful and balanced outcomes across the three pillars of the Treaty.

The Nuclear Weapon States cannot continue to deflect the majority of the international community's call for the disarmament of their nuclear arsenals. Russia and the United States must take the lead in restarting

the reduction of nuclear weapon stockpiles and to extend every effort to ensure a new arms race does not begin.

There are also many other significant actions the nuclear weapon states could take within the framework of the NPT. These include legally binding negative security assurances, risk reduction measures and increased transparency. These, and the full and effective implementation of past agreements, would significantly reduce international tensions and reinforce the multilateral system to which we are all committed.

We must also be creative and original in our approach to achieving our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons and not be limited by traditional, one-dimensional thinking. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons offers us a path to nuclear disarmament by finally putting in place a workable legal framework for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The Treaty is fully complementary with the NPT. The TPNW strengthens and reinforces the NPT and reaffirms it as the cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It is a facilitator, not an impediment to progress. As recognised in the NPT, TPNW and throughout the discussions on the humanitarian consequences of

nuclear weapons, the only true guarantee against the horrors of nuclear war is the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President,

All present will be well aware that Ireland is a determined and ambitious candidate for a seat on the Security Council at the elections to be held in 2020. The primary task of the Council is to preserve international peace and security and prevent future conflicts from emerging. It is our firmly held view that long-term sustainable peace and security can only be attained through multilateralism, effective cooperation and disarmament. Stagnation in this field cannot be allowed to continue; for the sake of this and future generations we must not gamble when the stakes involve nuclear weapons. A loss is simply too risky.

Allow me to conclude, Mr. President, by reaffirming our continued support for all efforts to bring the Conference on Disarmament back to work. It is a key element of the UN's disarmament machinery and I urge the Member States gathered here not to let the memory of past failures stymie ambition for future progress.

I began my remarks today with a reference to W. T. Cosgrave. His remarks in Geneva almost 100 years ago about the challenges facing a



troubled, post-war world have relevance for our endeavours today:  
‘Our history and the instinct of our hearts forbid us to think that  
temporary or even recurrent failures can deprive a just and steadfast  
purpose of the assurance of success’.

Distinguished delegates, there is no greater ‘just and steadfast purpose’  
than the cause of multilateralism and disarmament.

Thank You

ENDS