

**Opening of the UN Conference to Negotiate a  
Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards  
their Total Elimination – German position**

Over the past years, most of the countries members to the United Nations have been engaged in long and often controversial debates about how to make better progress in nuclear disarmament. Inspired and guided by the overall goal of “global zero”, of a world without nuclear weapons, no effort was spared to search for common ground on how to best advance nuclear disarmament, including in the Open-ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament which met in Geneva in 2016 and in the last UN General Assembly’s First Committee. Germany entirely shares the vision of a nuclear free world and is actively engaged in promoting the nuclear disarmament process. Consequently, Germany actively participated in the three Conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Norway, Mexico and Austria in 2013 and 2014 and in the work of the Open-ended Working Group in Geneva last year.

With this week’s beginning of nuclear weapons’ ban treaty negotiations at the United Nations, we seem to have reached a decisive road mark in our collective efforts towards nuclear disarmament. A number of countries have assembled in New York and started negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons. This approach seems to be a tempting shortcut to a goal which Germany shares, but unfortunately a shortcut that will lead to nowhere. In other words: We cannot see how such a path can bring us any inch closer to concrete nuclear disarmament. On the contrary – such an initiative risks carrying us further away from our joint objective.

Germany’s concern with commencing negotiations on a treaty to legally ban nuclear weapons is not only that a nuclear ban treaty without the involvement of nuclear weapon states will be ineffective. Moreover, such an approach will be divisive and counter-productive to the international community’s collective aim to seek real and concrete reductions in the number of nuclear warheads worldwide, as well as to

improve the concrete verification of important nuclear disarmament measures and preserve strong safeguards against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

For nuclear weapons to disappear nuclear weapon states will have to engage in the process.

In seeking ways forward towards general and complete nuclear disarmament, there is no alternative to ensuring that nuclear weapon states are engaged in the process and acknowledging that real progress can only be made if and when the international security environment is right. Unfortunately, this is not the case today while we are confronted with an increasingly challenging security environment. As a member of NATO, an immediate prohibition of nuclear weapons would not be compatible with our NATO commitments.

Another central concern remains the full effectiveness of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in its three pillars one of which is nuclear disarmament. An immediate "ban" of nuclear weapons without verification mechanisms or restrictions on the production of fissile material bears the risk of weakening the NPT – contrary to the intention of its proponents.

For these reasons, Germany has decided to stay away from the negotiations on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons. Instead, together with our partners, Germany is advocating a concrete, and more realistic alternative to the UN nuclear ban negotiations.

Our progressive step-by-step approach has identified concrete ways aiming for conditions that would allow for the continuous reduction of nuclear weapons by establishing the confidence and trust needed for such steps. It focuses on strengthening the NPT as the central cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. Implementation of the many of the elements of the Action Plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference will be key to making real and substantive progress towards nuclear disarmament, including:

- Early progress on restricting the production of fissile material as a shared priority of the international community. Together with Canada and the Netherlands, Germany sponsored a resolution on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty approved by the 71<sup>st</sup> General Assembly which aims at facilitating renewed efforts on preparing the ground for negotiations on an FMCT Treaty.

This constitutes a concrete and tangible measure towards nuclear disarmament. Work in the High-level FMCT expert Preparatory Group which will convene end July in Geneva is set to begin soon.

- Promoting the continued implementation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) which Germany signed early on. Germany is also part of the “Friends of the CTBT” which actively promotes prompt entry into force of the CTBT.
- Another important element of the step-by-step approach is the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV). IPNDV is aimed at making progress towards a robust and credible verification mechanism as an essential element on the way towards a world without nuclear weapons. Germany hosted the last IPNDV working group meeting in Berlin from 6-8 March 2017.
- Germany is also actively engaged in the Non-proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI) whose “signature approach” is to strengthen the NPT based on the Action Plan.

Germany remains convinced that there are compelling reasons to pursue a progressive approach geared towards effective, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament.