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UN Member States set to adopt 'historic' treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons

Elayne Whyte Gómez, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG) and President of the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. Photo: UN Photo/ Manuel Elias

6 July – In what is set to be a “historic” moment at the United Nations, Member States will adopt on Friday a legally-binding treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons.

“After our final review of the text yesterday, I am convinced that we have achieved a general consensus on a robust and comprehensive prohibition,” said Ambassador Elayne Whyte Gómez of Costa Rica, who serves as the President of the conference to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons.

“This will be a historic moment and it is the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty to be concluded in more than 20 years,” she told a news conference at UN Headquarters.

According to the draft text, the treaty covers the full range of nuclear-weapons-related activities, prohibiting undertaking by any State party to develop, test, produce, manufacture, acquire, possess or stockpile nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The prohibitions also include any undertaking to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The treaty will be open for signature to all States at UN Headquarters in New York on 19 September 2017, and enter into force 90 days after the 50th instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession has been deposited.

To date, however, a number of countries have stayed out of the negotiations, including the United States, Russia and other nuclear-weapon States, as well as many of their allies. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) has not joined the talks either.



In a recent interview, the newly appointed High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, told UN News that “nuclear-weapon States and some of their allies are not able to join the negotiations at the moment, but hopefully a treaty will be something they will be able to join eventually.”

She said that “the door must be open to all States, and this inclusiveness will have to be built into the treaty.”

The draft treaty does include various pathways for nuclear-armed States to join. For instance, a State must first eliminate its nuclear weapons programme prior to joining. That State would then need to cooperate with the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in verifying the correctness and completeness of its nuclear inventory, thus following the same path as South Africa in the 1990s.

“Since this is a negotiation, no delegation can leave having gained everything they asked for from their national perspective,” noted Ms. Gómez, while adding that she was confident that “the final draft has captured the aspirations of the overwhelming majority of those participating in the conference, including civil society, whose enthusiasm, knowledge and collective experience have been a key driver of this process.”

In response to questions, Ms. Gómez stressed the importance of putting an international legal norm in place as a first step towards achieving a nuclear-weapons-free world, explaining that when conditions later become ripe for those nuclear-armed States to join, an architecture by which to do so exists.

All humanity expects that nuclear-armed States join the treaty “sooner than later,” but “I have no dates,” she said.

Asked about the impact on the negotiations of the current tensions over the DPRK’s nuclear programme and ballistic missiles activities, she said that having a norm in place does influence the behaviors of a State. It also plays a fundamental role in shaping a new security paradigm for the 21st century, she added.

“The treaty, no doubt, will compliment and strengthen the global architecture on nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation regime. This is a historic event for humanity.”

In Myanmar, UN refugee chief calls for solutions to displacement and exclusion



Children walk on a path between shelters at a camp for displaced people in Rakhine State, Myanmar, Thursday 6 April 2017. Most of the displaced people are women and children. Photo: UNICEF/Brown

6 July – Concluding his first visit to Myanmar, the United Nations refugee chief today appealed for inclusive and sustainable solutions to protracted displacement and statelessness.

“These are complex issues but they are not intractable,” said High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi in a press release issued by his office (UNHCR).

In Kachin and Rakhine states, some 100,000 and 120,000 people, respectively, have remained displaced for more than five years following the eruption of inter-communal conflict between Buddhists and minority Muslim Rohingya.

In Rakhine state, Mr. Grandi met with displaced Muslims in Sittwe’s Dar Paing camp who expressed their strong desire to return home. He also reached out to Rakhine and Muslim communities north of

Maungdaw and listened to their safety and livelihood concerns.

He also met with high-ranking officials in the South-east Asian nation to discuss humanitarian access in Kachin and Rakhine states.

“A crucial first step is to pursue freedom of movement and access to services and livelihoods for all. Accelerated pathways to citizenship are also part of the solution, as are efforts to tackle exclusion and poverty,” Mr. Grandi said, alluding to the country’s denial of citizenship for the Rohingya.

Among the officials he met with were State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi; the Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Min Myat Aye; the Minister of Labour, Immigration and Population, U Thein Swe; and the Minister of Border Affairs, Lt. Gen Ye Aung.

“I was very happy to hear the State Counsellor saying that refugees are welcome back from Thailand,” said Mr. Grandi. “We agreed that returns must be voluntary and sustainable. Refugees should not come back to a situation of dependency but of self-reliance.”

He highlighted that the recommendations of the Advisory Commission of Rakhine State provide an important roadmap for the way forward.

The High Commissioner will next visit Thailand before concluding his regional trip in Bangladesh next week.

Monthly global food price index up 1.4 per cent; cereal stocks set to hit new record, says UN agency



A farmer collects rice after a harvest in Sundorgonj, Gaibanda, Bangladesh. Photo: IFAD/GMB Akash

6 July – Rising prices of cereals, meat and dairy products have pushed the global food price index up by 1.4 per cent compared to last month and 7.0 per cent compared to last year, the United Nations agriculture agency has said.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the rise in the Food Price Index – a measure of the monthly change in international prices of a basket of food commodities – was largely because of surging prices of high-protein wheat due to deteriorating crop conditions in the United States.

“June marked the second successive month of increase in the value of the Food Price Index,” read an update issued by the UN agency.

On the other hand, price indices for vegetable oils and sugar declined by 6.5 points (3.9 per cent) and nearly 31 points (13.4 per cent), respectively, it added.

The fall in the Sugar Price Index marked a new 16-month low. The prices have fallen steadily since February, with the continued decline reflecting large export availabilities, in particular robust Brazilian supplies.

“Weak import demand has exerted further downward pressure on [sugar] quotations, especially as purchases by the world's leading importer, China, have slowed following the imposition of high import tariffs,” said FAO.

In terms of the indices, the Cereal Price Index averaged 154.3 points in June (up 6.2 points compared to May); Vegetable Oil Price Index, 162.1 points (down 6.5 points); Dairy Price Index, 209 points (up 15.9 points); Sugar Price Index (197.3 points, down nearly 31 points).

The Meat Price Index averaged 175.2 points in June (up 3.2 points). However, this value was derived using a mixture of projected and observed prices as most prices used in the calculation of the Index were not available when the Food Price Index was computed.

Cereal stocks on course to hit new record

Also today, FAO announced that despite tightening supply conditions for high-protein wheat, global cereal supplies are likely to remain abundant in the coming year.

“World cereal stocks are expected to expand further to a new record high of around 704 million tonnes,” said the UN agency, announcing its updated Cereal Supply and Demand Brief, also released today.

According to the Brief, the June forecast for global wheat output in 2017 were revised down, while those of maize and rice rose and global cereal production this year is likely to total 2,593 million tonnes, some 0.6 per cent below that of 2016.

At UN, panel probing chemical weapons use in Syria urges independence



Edmond Mulet, Head of the Security Council Joint Investigative Mechanism on Chemical Weapon Use in Syria. Photo: UN Photo/Mark Garten

6 July – Noting that its members are working in a highly politicized environment, the panel investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria today appealed to the international community to allow it to complete its work in an independent, impartial and professional manner.

“We do receive, unfortunately, direct and indirect messages, all the time, from many sides, telling us how to do our work; my message again, to the Council today was, please let us do our work,” said Edmond Mulet, the head of the three-member panel leading the Joint Investigative Mechanism on Chemical Weapon Use in Syria.

“We have a highly professional team,” Mr. Mulet told reporters at United Nations Headquarters, speaking alongside the two other members of the panel, Judy Cheng-Hopkins and Stefan Mogl. “We will present our findings based on fact and science.”

The Joint Investigative Mechanism, comprising the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN, is currently investigating the 4 April 2017 attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun. Images of that incident showed children struggling to breathe as a result of the possible use of sarin gas. Also being examined are the incidents in Umm Hawsh on 16 September 2016, where sulphur mustard may have been used.

Addressing the press following a closed-door briefing to the Security Council on the Mechanism's sixth progress report, the panel said that the starting point of the Mechanism's investigation is the determination by an earlier fact-finding mission that a specific incident in Syria involved or likely involved the use of chemicals as weapons.

The Mechanism is now gathering all relevant information concerning the two reported incidents, and stressed the importance of feedback from the Syrian Government on flight logs, notes on movements and lists of people interviewed.

“We're working with the Syrian Government on this, and hopefully we'll be given the necessary tools to do our work,” Mr. Mulet said, encouraging any other government, organization or entity to share information about these incidents with the Mechanism.

He added that the three members of the panel “absolutely condemn” the use of chemical weapons and is working to identify the purported perpetrators.

Findings are expected to be presented to the Security Council in mid-October, said Mr. Mulet.

'Progress' in Astana, ahead of Geneva talks

Also today, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said “progress” had been achieved in the latest round of international talks in the Kazakh capital of Astana which will contribute to supporting the intra-Syrian talks due to resume in Geneva on Monday.

The discussions in Astana – being held between the Syrian conflict parties and led by Russia, Turkey and Iran – have focused on de-escalating the violence and strengthening a ceasefire in Syria.

“We have tried already three times you know with the ceasefire in Syria in the last period of the last three years, so we really want to give a chance to what is being done here and we believe that efforts have been producing progress,” Mr. de Mistura told the press.

There are also discussion about confidence-building measures, including humanitarian demining and the issue of detainees, abductees and people who disappeared during the conflict.

The UN envoy confirmed that a new round of the intra-Syrian talks would begin in Geneva on 10 July, and that the progress in Astana could lead “to some progress on the political side” during the talks.

There have been technical discussions and meetings, said Mr. de Mistura, bringing “some clarity” and “some form of unity” among the opposition.

He noted the G20 meeting in Hamburg, Germany, due to start tomorrow, would be “a good occasion” for world leaders to address the Syrian conflict.

Mr. de Mistura's work is guided by UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a roadmap for a peace process in Syria, including issues of governance, constitution and elections.

UN mission in Mali condemns ceasefire breaches by peace accord signatories



Representatives of the signatory groups (Plateforme and CMA), pictured here in the foreground, meet with the head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix (center) and Mahamat Saleh Annadif (left), head of MINUSMA, in May 2017. Photo: UN Photo/ Sylvain Liechti

6 July – The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali today condemned continuing ceasefire violations by two signatories of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.

The accord was signed in June 2015 by the Coordination des Mouvements de l’Azawad (CMA) armed group, following its signature in May 2015 by the Government and a third party, the Plateforme coalition of armed groups.

“These violations [by CMA and Plateforme] include movements of armed convoys, provocations and even armed clashes, like the ones ongoing south of Aguelhok,” UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York.

Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), urged the leadership of both groups to put an end to these violations

immediately.

“If violations persist, they risk undermining their credibility as partners in Mali's quest for a lasting peace,” said Mr. Annadif.

INTERVIEW: 'Disarmament matters' in times of crisis, stresses new High Representative



Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, addresses the Security Council debate on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Photo: UN Photo/ Manuel Elias

6 July – Izumi Nakamitsu has taken the helm of United Nations disarmament affairs at a time when needs are greatest for the world to invest in conflict prevention.

Some argue that disarmament is not the right issue to negotiate when the international security environment is deteriorating.

“We counter that argument,” Ms. Nakamitsu, the newly appointed High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, told *UN News*, stressing that “disarmament matters” even more so in times of high tensions over security issues.

“Disarmament is all about preventing major catastrophes in times of conflict,” she said. “It helps decrease tensions, create space for dialogue and build trust and confidence.”

Her appointment also came at a critical phase of nuclear disarmament. UN Member States are negotiating a treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, with the talks scheduled to conclude on 7 July.

To date, however, a number of countries are staying out of the negotiations, including the United States, Russia and other nuclear-weapon States, as well as many of their allies, including Japan. The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea has not joined the talks either.

“Hopefully a treaty will be something they will be able to join eventually,” she said, stressing that “the door must be open to all States and this inclusiveness will have to be built into the treaty.”

Ms. Nakamitsu also spoke about the ongoing stalemate in the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, her goals for her first 100 days in office, and advice for women aspiring to senior UN leadership positions.

UN News: The Secretary-General has made conflict prevention one of his top priorities. How does the disarmament agenda fit into this picture?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Disarmament is all about preventing major catastrophes in times of conflict. Everything we do in disarmament negotiations and discussions needs to fuse into the prevention agenda. What we are doing has an enormous preventive effect. Disarmament is also part of a political solution to the conflict. It helps decrease tensions, create space for dialogue and build trust and confidence. We counter the argument that when the international security environment is deteriorating or tensions are increasing, disarmament is not the right issue to be put on the table. Rather, because the security environment is difficult, we have to talk about disarmament. It has preventive and trust-building effects. It has to be part of a political solution to any dispute or conflict.

UN News: Disarmament is a politically charged subject. How do you intend to deal with this issue?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Yes, it is politically sensitive and challenging. But the kind of work we do at the United Nations is always very challenging and politically sensitive. So the role we are expected to play is to build bridges between different political positions of Member States, give sound advice at the technical and substantive level, and make sure that Member States negotiating those very politically charged issues will be able to find their own solutions and find common ground. Political difficulty is just part of our job. And if I could add, that’s why it is an exciting type of work.

UN News: The United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons is under way. What is the expected outcome? Nuclear-weapon States, many of their allies and States such as the Democratic People’s

Republic of Korea are missing from the negotiations. Does the absence of these States in the talks undercut the outcome?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Through a resolution, the General Assembly mandated Member States to negotiate a treaty. It is ongoing, so I can't really say what kind of treaty it is going to be. Member States are working very hard to conclude the negotiations by the 7 July deadline. It is true that a number of countries decided to stay out of the negotiations. Because which negotiations they will participate in or not is a decision made by those individual Member States, there is nothing we can say about it. But as the Secretariat, we've been advising Member States that are part of the negotiations that if they want to have the objectives of nuclear disarmament, then a treaty will have to be something that will become inclusive in the future.

Nuclear-weapon States and some of their allies are not able to join the negotiations at the moment, but hopefully a treaty will be something they will be able to join eventually. The door must be open to all States. This inclusiveness will have to be built into the treaty. I hope concerns expressed by non-participants will be taken into account by those negotiating the treaty.

UN News: The Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament (CD) has not produced any concrete results since 1996. How can you help break this deadlock?

Izumi Nakamitsu: The Conference on Disarmament has been in stalemate for the past 20-plus years. I was in Geneva recently. I sensed that the frustration of not having produced any substantial results is shared by many Member States that are part of the body. As a result of this shared feeling that something has to happen, there is now a working group on the way ahead. Member States are beginning to engage in a process of putting their heads together and find an option on how to move forward. I advise all Member States involved to think outside the box and to be creative and innovative to find common ground. They still consider the CD to be an important instrument. I will definitely support the efforts of Member States.

UN News: Disarmament is more than just nuclear disarmament. Can you briefly explain other aspects of work undertaken by the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Nuclear disarmament remains important, with the nuclear weapons prohibition treaty being negotiated at the moment and the preparatory process having started for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We are in a critical phase of the overall nuclear disarmament issue.

But we also have a very acute, priority agenda in the area of chemical weapons. Chemical weapons use in Syria is one of the priority agendas not just for my office but also the Security Council and the international community. We have a very strong comprehensive Chemical Weapons Convention, but the taboo against chemical weapons use is unfortunately being undermined. We have to make sure that this norm is restored so that no chemical weapons use is allowed, and if it is violated, we have to bring perpetrators to accountability. We also have the Biological Weapons Convention and a number of different disarmament treaties. We need to make sure that proper implementation and well-functioning of these instruments continue. We have some financial issues with some of these, to which financial health must be brought back.

Conventional arms and light weapons is the area where we can demonstrate much more in terms of real impacts on the ground. The vast majority of the victims today get killed by conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons. This must be definitely highlighted as it has a direct link to what the UN does in its peace operations, etc. We work with governments to assist their capacity-building in these areas, including ways to improve the safety and security of ammunition stockpiles in order to avoid accidental explosions and diversion of ammunition.

The area I'm very interested in, and the Secretary-General is keen on, is what he calls 'frontier issues.' Those include cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. Cyberattacks have become a regular occurrence. We need to make sure that these new issues, closely related to rapid technological and scientific development, will become a top priority of Member States. They are now addressing these concerns at the expert level but our work must also be accelerated and intensified in this area.

So disarmament has many dimensions. I hope, through some of our efforts in disarmament education, the public, especially

younger people, will have a comprehensive understanding of what constitutes the disarmament agenda, which is very complicated and multifaceted.

UN News: You started your current position in May. What would you like to accomplish in your first 100 days and during your term?

Izumi Nakamitsu: I'm new to disarmament. So for the first 100 days, my ambition is to fully understand the disarmament file, a hugely complicated area with a lot of technical details. I already began to understand the political side of the issue, but within 100 days I would like to understand those technical details and have a better knowledge of all areas of disarmament. During my tenure? Well, I'm sort of a humble person. I don't have catchy words to characterize my ambitions for the medium or longer term. But there are a couple of things. The international security environment is very difficult at the moment, but I would definitely like to achieve a political understanding among most of the Member States of the UN – that because it is difficult, disarmament matters.

And the second is sort of a creation of the political will at the level of the Member States. I would very much like to have some sort of a vision of the international community for disarmament in the 21st century. There are new issues like cyber (security), artificial intelligence, etc. Disarmament is actually one of the oldest mandates of the United Nations – it goes back to the founding of the United Nations. We have a unique place in the UN. But I think it will also be really good if we can bring disarmament into the 21st century, and understand the new issues that the international community has to grapple with and the priority and sequence of the issues that we have to put our heads together to create a safer and more secure world. That is what disarmament is all about – it is about making the world a safer, more secure place.

UN News: The Secretary-General is committed to achieving gender parity in senior management appointments. What is the significance of a woman leading UN disarmament affairs?

Izumi Nakamitsu: I'm the second female to head the UN disarmament office. I never actually thought about it. At the professional level, I don't think it makes much difference if you are a man or woman leading an office in any field. The important thing is that whoever is most qualified, men or women, should be doing the job. That's what the message should be.

UN News: Can you speak a bit about the strengths women can bring to disarmament?

Izumi Nakamitsu: I don't usually generalize things. I have worked in the field and met female snipers. You cannot necessarily say women are peace-loving. But women's soft-spoken style or gentle approach may make a difference when tensions are high. I have always been able to speak to the most difficult people in those situations. I think it was partly because I am a woman. I showed up at negotiations at the country or local levels or at checkpoints; commanders were not expecting that a woman would show up to negotiate with them. The area of peace and security, including disarmament, tends to be still a bit dominated by men, as many people used to come with military backgrounds. But it's changing. What we do at the UN is political work. So if you are interested in peace and security, and a woman, the door is wide open for you.

UN News: Do you have any advice for women aspiring to senior UN leadership positions?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Work hard. If you are working hard and doing a good job, have a trust in the system that there are always people who are watching you and appreciating your work. Think about how to excel in your job.

UN News: How does your previous experience in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other parts of the UN system help you in your current post?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Many different ways. I'm happy to have done all these different areas of work. Definitely for one thing, the network of people I have across the UN system is useful. Everywhere I go, I usually know people. That helps because if I need to do something or move a difficult file, I can always call up different people and ask them to give me advice. But more substantively, because of my years of experience in different fields, I really understand the close linkages between



conflict, peace and security, humanitarian affairs and development, and how we need to look at these things more comprehensively to find a solution. One often-talked-about weakness within and beyond the UN system is working in silos.

UN News: Being a national of Japan, the only country to have suffered nuclear attacks, is there anything you can do to advance the disarmament agenda?

Izumi Nakamitsu: Hibakusha, survivors of nuclear bombs, have been courageously sharing their stories and experiences. That has really moved a number of very influential actors in the international peace movement and across civil society around the world. They have not just kept nuclear disarmament discussions alive, but created additional momentum. Whenever I talk about nuclear disarmament, I always try to refer to their heroic and tireless efforts. I can be a messenger who spreads their words around the world through my work at the UN as well as convey voices I pick up from the international community back to Japan.