

Points for informal interactive debate on OEWG, 14 October

- Ironic that states which bemoan the lack of concrete action through the step by step approach, choosing to ignore the reductions in warhead numbers and the much diminished salience of nuclear weapons in security strategies, champion a ban on nuclear weapons which they acknowledge will have no impact on either.
- How can a ban be any more normative than the NPT? The only signatories are likely to be those who have already foresworn nuclear weapons.
- Some have said that a ban is a natural progression for the NPT. It isn't. A Nuclear Weapons Convention might be, when all nuclear weapons possessing states are willing to cross the line to zero. A convention could lock in a revised grand bargain whereby no state is allowed to possess or develop nuclear weapons in return for which access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy will be assured. But that will be an instrument for maintaining a world free from nuclear weapons, not a means of getting us to such a world.
- Some have said a ban is simply the easiest thing to do. But we shouldn't do something without first ensuring that it will not make the situation worse.
- A ban risks creating a less certain world of the sort we had before the NPT, when regions were faced with the prospect of nuclear proliferation, and uncertainty impeded access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- A ban also has the potential to do great harm to the process of multilateral disarmament. An absolutist approach like the ban leaves no room for compromise yet the multilateral process works only through compromise.
- The compromise on disarmament has been the step-by-step approach, the gradual negotiation away by the NWS of the ability to develop, produce and deploy nuclear weapons while still maintaining deterrence and the security and stability that goes with it.
- Even on HINW we have found compromise because, just as the concern about those effects is one of the drivers for disarmament, so the ability to cause unacceptable harm underpins nuclear deterrence.
- But signing a ban treaty and maintaining credible deterrence are irreconcilable: a weapon whose use you will not countenance under any circumstances cannot have any deterrent value. No state that wishes to depend on nuclear deterrence can sign a ban treaty in good faith.
- Consider the Anti Personnel Land Mine and Cluster Munitions conventions. Both discussions started in the CCW. Both bans were negotiated elsewhere. Now there is no discussion of either issue in the CCW, no desire to find a compromise with those who for whatever reason are unable to sign those bans. There is a very real risk the NPT will be hollowed-out in the same way. And with one of the Treaty's three pillars destroyed, what hope for the other two?
- We tried to establish a process in the Conference on Disarmament that would rebuild the consensus on nuclear disarmament. We will try again during the NPT review cycle starting next year.