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Statement by H.E. Ambassador SHEN Jian at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament on Agenda Item 4: “Effective International Arrangements to Assure Non-nuclear-weapon States Against the Use or Threat of Use of Nuclear Weapons”

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Mr. President,

The agenda item “effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons” has been on the agenda of the CD since its very first session. Such arrangements are conducive to decreasing the role of nuclear weapons in national security policies, and reducing the non-nuclear-weapon states’ motivation for acquiring such weapons, are therefore an important intermediary measure to move forward the nuclear disarmament process, and to safeguard and strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Non-nuclear-weapon states’ appeal to be safeguarded against the threat of nuclear weapons, and to have such assurances in the form of a legally-binding instrument, is entirely legitimate and reasonable. China took note that most countries, especially the G21 countries, prioritized security assurances in their statement during this week’s plenary meetings and urged the CD to start substantive work in this regard and launch negotiations on a universal, unconditional and legally-binding instrument.

Mr. President,

For quite some time, the international community has had in-depth discussions on Negative Security Assurances within various forums, including the UN General Assembly, Security Council and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and arrived at some basic common understandings in this regard. In 1978, the Final Document of the SSOD-I called for efforts to “conclude appropriate, effective, arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons”. In 1995, Security Council Resolution 984 recognized the non-nuclear-weapon state parties’ legitimate interest in assurances against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. In the same year, the NPT Review and Extension Conference adopted the recommendation that “further steps be considered to assure non-nuclear-weapon States party to the Treaty against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons”, and that these steps “could take the form of an internationally legally binding instrument”. In 2010, the NPT Review Conference adopted an action plan, in which the action 7 called on the CD to immediately begin discussions of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, and to discuss substantively, without limitation, with a view to elaborating recommendations dealing with all aspects of this issue, not excluding an internationally legally binding instrument. The UN General Assembly adopts resolutions on a yearly basis, including Resolution A/RES/78/18 in 2023 which is supported by 123 countries, to stress the urgent need for such an arrangements, and recommend that the CD actively continue intensive negotiations.

With the adoption of relevant UN security council resolutions and establishment of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, there is a certain level of security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon states. Nevertheless, such assurances cannot meet the need of non-nuclear-weapon states, and fall short in terms of their universality, unconditionality and legally-binding nature.

Mr. President,

Elimination of the threat of nuclear weapons and nuclear warfare and the ultimate complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons serve the common interest of all human beings. Before achieving this goal, China would like to propose as follows:

First, all nuclear-weapon states should make a clear commitment to the policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and refrain from the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapon against a non-nuclear-weapon state unconditionally. Meanwhile, nuclear-weapon states should negotiate and conclude a treaty on “mutual no-first-use of nuclear weapons”. China is committed to the policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, and has all along called upon other nuclear-weapon states to make such commitments, and conclude a legally-binding instrument in this regard. We look forward to positive response from other nuclear-weapon states.

Second, the CD should start substantive work, at an early date, to negotiate and conclude an international legal instrument on Negative Security Assurances. In the past, the CD had many discussions regarding the Negative Security Assurance issue, and set up multiple subsidiary bodies, including Ad Hoc committees and Ad Hoc working groups. Most recently, in 2022, the CD established a subsidiary body and had in-depth discussions on this issue. Although differences remain in terms of level of priority, scope and common approach, and the subsidiary body did not adopt a report, there is no objection, in principle, to the idea of effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon states against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. Under such current circumstances, the CD needs to scale up efforts and start negotiations for a legal instrument on Negative Security Assurance at an early date.

China supports Indonesia, the President, and the succeeding presidents in formulating a comprehensive and balanced Program of Work of the CD this year, through which we continue to establish subsidiary bodies, come up with a road map or timetable, and promote the early conclusion of an international legal instrument on Negative Security Assurances.

In the meantime, the latest review cycle of NPT must also prioritize the issue of Negative Security Assurances, and work for early, unconditional security assurances by nuclear weapon states for the benefit of non-nuclear-weapon states.

Third, nuclear-weapon states should downgrade the role of nuclear weapons in their national security policies, rescind the nuclear deterrence policy based on first-use, not list any country as target of nuclear strikes, and refrain from targeting any country with the nuclear weapons under their control. Relevant nuclear-weapon states should also withdraw their nuclear weapons deployed overseas, and cease strengthening of the “extended deterrence” arrangements.

Fourth, nuclear-weapon states should support efforts towards building Nuclear Weapon Free Zones by non-nuclear-weapon states, and shoulder related responsibilities in a legally-binding manner. Building Nuclear Weapon Free Zones is key to a world free of nuclear weapons, and is significant for realizing the goals of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, and advancing peace and security at regional and international levels. The international community should support relevant countries’ efforts, guided by Article VII of the NPT and the set of principles and guidelines recommended by the UN Disarmament Commission in 1999, to build Nuclear Weapon Free Zones. Nuclear-weapon states shall respect the legal status of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, sign or ratify the protocols to Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaties, and act on relevant security assurances. China has all along supported international efforts towards the building of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, and has signed all protocols of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaties that are open for signature. China firmly supports ASEAN’s efforts to build a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, and reiterate its willingness to take the lead in signing the Protocol to the South East Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty. China supports relevant countries’ efforts for a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and looks forward to its early establishment.

Mr. President,

China takes note of the fact that a certain country linked the issue of Negative Security Assurances with the FMCT negotiations, stating that only when the FMCT is included in the Programme of Work, and in particular, starting negotiations on the Treaty will they be prepared to “engage with other counties on their priorities, such as Negative Security Assurances”. This indicates that there is no inherent difficulty for this certain country with regard to discussion of Negative Security Assurances. It’s just that the country holds different view on the issue’s level of priority.

I takes note of the specific issues just mentioned by our distinguished colleague of the United States. China calls on all sides to respond to the legitimate concern and strong appeal of the vast number of non-nuclear-weapon states, expand our common ground, make common efforts for substantive work regarding the issue.

Thank you, Mr. President.