Statement

by

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to the United Nations

High-level Meeting to Commemorate and Promote
the International Day
for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

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Mr. President,

I would like to thank you for holding this very important meeting on the International Day for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

Seventy-five years after resolution one by the General Assembly in 1946 called for the elimination of nuclear weapons, the global nuclear arsenals are bigger, more sophisticated and more lethal, and they represent the most dangerous threat to humanity and to world peace.

This is at a time when conflicts are mushrooming everywhere, the world is sliding into global instability, and the rule based system is under threat. But unfortunately, we are not paying the required attention to this issue. It is true that the world has a lot on its plate, especially the Coronavirus pandemic, and the climate crisis, but nuclear weapons are the single most existential threat to humanity.

We ignore them at our peril.

Here I would like to echo the call of the Secretary-General’s alarm on climate, but this time for nuclear weapons: The world must wake up.

All the signs are there, it’s time to wake up. The Doomsday clock is now 100 seconds to midnight, just imagine 100 seconds, closer than anytime ever in its history, according to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, citing worsening the nuclear threat and lack of climate action.

On Nuclear proliferation, and eliminating nuclear weapons as on climate, the world is moving in the wrong direction, is divided and the threat is higher than ever.

Nuclear weapons are witnessing a renewal by the big powers, and despite reduction in some of their arsenals, they are modernizing and upgrading them. Some countries are producing more nuclear weapons, and even during the pandemic, some of them increased the size of their arsenals, violating the NPT.

We all know, by now, that there are nine nuclear states. According to SIPRI, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, these nine states possess approximately 13,865 nuclear weapons. There are 1800 nuclear warheads that remain on high alert and ready to be launched, increasing the risk of accidental detonation.

This is at a time when the arms control regime, after suffering serious setbacks over the last few years, is weaker. This put the disarmament process in disarray, and wiped out the gains of a half century of arms control.

The picture should not be that bleak though. There are two developments that give a glimmer of hope of a better future on the proliferation and the arms control fronts.

- The January 26 agreement between the United States and Russia to extend the New Start Treaty, for five years, is a welcome development.

- The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear weapons entered into force on January 22 with a total of 86 signatory countries.
The delayed NPT Review Conference is set to start early next year, providing the best hope. Our world has to make real progress, and advance the non-proliferation agenda.

The big powers and the nuclear powers, have the responsibility to lead on this issue to strengthen the non-proliferation regime before it is too late. Our world is becoming more dangerous, and divided with numerous conflicts. This could lead more states to pursuing the bomb.

Time to act is now. One good place to start is on the nuclear free zones, an important component of the global nuclear disarmament.

The Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear weapons’ conference was held here in NY in 2019. The only country in the Middle East that is believed to possess nuclear weapons did not attend it. Israel, a non NPT party, stayed away.

This November, the 2021 Middle East NFZ conference will be held under the leadership of Kuwait. The conference is a golden opportunity to show commitment to a peaceful region by engaging constructively on ridding the region of nuclear weapons.

Another place to start the process of the elimination of nuclear weapons, is by guaranteeing the universality and the entry into force of the CTBT.

Mr. President, friends,

There is no mask or vaccine to stop radiation and nuclear fallout. There is one thing we can do to eliminate nuclear weapons. We need to unite and work together. No one country can do this alone. Time is of the essence. Let us start now.

I thank you.