



*Joint Working Group Meeting of the IPNDV in Brussels
(27-29 June 2022)*

**Opening remarks by Mr. Axel Kenes, Director-General of Multilateral Affairs and Globalization
Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Belgium**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear participants,

It is my pleasure to welcome you in Brussels for the first in-person meeting of the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV) in over two years.

While it may already be a cliché to open a speech with a reference to the many online meetings we had during the pandemic, the fact remains that for many of our activities there is no replacement for face-to-face gatherings. For us to be able to resume these types of conferences can only benefit the goal of the IPNDV to develop techniques for nuclear disarmament verification.

This goal, ladies and gentlemen, has only grown in importance over the past few months. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has pushed nuclear weapons back into the public debate. Meanwhile, nuclear-armed States and one nuclear-weapon State are expanding their nuclear arsenals. Other nations may be trying to acquire these weapons.

We do not know when we will be able to move back to negotiating nuclear arms control agreements involving the major actors. What we do know, however, is that humanity has a shared interest in those agreements and that we must be ready when the opportunity presents itself.

Many are working hard to create this opportunity. We are standing in one of the capitals of the multilateral order. Not too far from us, in the offices of the EU and NATO, matters of geopolitical tension and our common security are being discussed by diplomats as we speak.

Speaking as a diplomat myself, I can say that when the opportunity arises, negotiators will rely on the technical expertise such as that of the IPNDV. If the bright minds gathered here can develop procedures and technology for the verification of nuclear weapon dismantlement, future talks have a higher chance of being meaningful and successful.

I would also like to note the value of the composition of this group, which involves scientists and representatives of both nuclear- and non-nuclear- weapon States. Ultimately, we all have a stake in a world without nuclear weapons. If our international rules-based order is to survive it will depend on the engagement and efforts of all of us.

Finally, let me extend my gratitude to the United States for its dynamic and inspired leadership of the IPNDV and for the excellent cooperation in organizing this meeting.

Thank you for your attention.