



Opening Remarks of the Netherlands at the IPNDV Annual Plenary Meeting Sydney, Australia - December 5, 2022

Delivered by Ambassador Piet de Klerk

Distinguished delegates/dear colleagues,

Like others I would like to start by expressing our gratitude to the Australian authorities for organising this plenary meeting - a meeting with a long gestation period, because it was already planned before Covid hit. The good thing is: this is a meeting we have been looking forward to for a long time. And, here we are. Thanks also for the US delegation and NTI for preparing this meeting.

It seems to us that we are meeting at an important point in time. IPNDV is primarily a technical forum, but it is impossible not to see the conceptual and technical challenges we are wrestling with in their context. We all have witnessed threats to use nuclear weapons earlier in the year. These veiled threats - couched in terms of using *all weapon systems available*, using *cutting-edge weapons*, and retaliation in case of nuclear blackmail - are matters of great concern to us, especially with a war going on.

The Netherlands sees the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and all speculation about advantages and disadvantages of having nuclear weapons as an incentive for doubling our efforts to reduce the role and the number of nuclear weapons, increase our efforts to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons - prevent miscommunication, misperception and accidents, but also deescalate when facing intentional threats, and ultimately achieve their complete elimination.

We continue to see the role of IPNDV in that process as being of great importance, both in terms of the process of cooperation among IPNDV participating states and in terms of the deliverables coming out of the process, and we are happy that this meeting will give its seal of approval to several new deliverables.

For us, the NPT is and will remain the cornerstone, and only legally binding instrument, of nuclear disarmament efforts and of efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons. Perhaps it was unavoidable – given the war - that the recent Review Conference couldn't agree on a Final Document, but for my authorities that doesn't reduce the usefulness of the Treaty, nor does it say much about the health of the Treaty. On the contrary, we were encouraged by the many instances in New York where there was broad agreement among the parties. The willingness of all states parties – minus one – to compromise in order to find consensus displayed commitment to the NPT and to multilateralism in general.

Mr Chairman, the legal context is one thing, the context of other activities that run to some extent parallel to IPNDV is another. Many of us will start that list with the present UN Group of Governmental Experts on disarmament verification, others will refer to the Quad or one





of the many round tables with various think tanks active in this field. What I would like to add to that list is an UNIDIR exercise supported by the Netherlands and some other states, most of whom are represented around this table [or if mentioned by another delegation: I would like to echo what X said etc]. The practical verification exercise will take place in March 2023 in Switzerland and will concentrate on the absence of nuclear-weapons material. Of course, IPNDV participants will be briefed on the results.

Since the Ottawa Plenary in 2019, and the start of Phase III we have operated under the motto *From Paper to Practice* and despite the pandemic we have made good progress in that direction. There are, however, important conceptual issues that deserve attention also in this Phase, and as a service to other delegations the Netherlands together with Germany has listed them in the *Food for Thought* paper we distributed last week (we have some hard copies available if need be). In short, these issues are: the irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons material (Step 14); the need to look at verification at large (or if you want from a *systems perspective* over the life of a treaty); how far can you get with maintaining the chain of custody; the question of absence and presence measurements; the composition of the nuclear material in weapons, and the need to further look into high explosives. None of these issues is new; all we say is that we should not lose sight of them, also not in this phase III. How to combine greater attention to these issues in the present structure is a matter for further debate.

Mr. Chairman,

IPNDV has achieved a lot in the last 7 years. There are probably limits to what a partnership like this can achieve, but for us that is no reason to rest on our laurels and our *Food for Thought* is meant as a stimulus for going forward in Phase III. We will debate here – given that the next NPT Review Conference is planned for 2026 – how long this current Phase should last. We are inclined to say: not longer than it is foreseen now, rather shorter, but we will come to that. What is central in our thinking is that IPNDV is one of the few places where we are actually preparing, in a constructive spirit, a future with less and ultimately no nuclear weapons.

Thank you.

