Speech by Minister of State Michael Roth to the German Bundestag on disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation

2017-06-29

Mr President,

Fellow members of this House,

Looking at our crisis-riven and conflict-plagued world today, it is clear that disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are needed more urgently than ever. Our foreign and security policy is committed to precisely these principles. We all know that more weapons will not create more security in Europe and the world. Yet, in the present situation, achieving a more peaceful world with fewer weapons is very much an uphill struggle. It has, presumably, never been harder since the fall of the Wall, the collapse of the Communist regime, German reunification and the end of the division of Europe.

Our security situation has deteriorated dramatically in recent years. Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in eastern Ukraine have shaken the pillars of Europe’s security order.

In our European neighbourhood, armed conflicts in Syria and elsewhere are spreading fear and terror. But that’s not all. The disarmament and arms control architecture that has taken decades to build is under tremendous strain. We must address this.

That is why, in light of growing concern about Europe’s security, the German Government decided in mid-2016 to establish a comprehensive initiative to relaunch conventional arms control in Europe.

Through it, we want to achieve greater trust and predictability, reduce military risk and avert an arms race. This initiative has received much approval from our European partners.

During Germany’s

OSCE

Chairmanship in 2016, we reached consensus on a dialogue. It will initially address the fundamental challenges we face with a view to ensuring our common security in Europe. We

wish to build on this, as a basis on which the difficult questions related to arms control can be tackled.

For many years, Germany has been campaigning hard to achieve concrete progress on nuclear disarmament, both vis-à-vis nuclear-weapon states and in international disarmament forums. The results have been very mixed.

I myself participated in the United Nations Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York in April 2015. Unfortunately, this conference ended without the parties signing an ambitious Final Document.

That was unsatisfactory. But we must not be discouraged by such setbacks and disappointments. It is of course easier to sit down with like-minded partners and lament the state of the world.

But I believe that, especially when talking about a world without nuclear weapons, those countries that possess such weapons should be brought to the table. This is the only way to achieve progress. Persistent diplomacy can, after all, pay off!

Take Iran, for instance. In 2015, after more than ten years of difficult negotiations, in a joint effort with the

EU

, the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom, we permanently and verifiably blocked Iran’s pathway to nuclear weapons. Recently, the International Atomic Energy Agency reconfirmed that Iran has so far honoured its nuclear obligations laid down in the Vienna agreement.

We are working towards the goal of a world without nuclear weapons – or, as arms control experts say, Global Zero. We know this ambitious goal cannot be reached overnight. Nuclear disarmament is very much a long-term effort – and requires trust between partners.

Therefore, despite difficult circumstances, and especially these days, when we are facing numerous conflicts and crises, we must work to develop new trust, launch new initiatives and summon new courage with a view to achieving disarmament.

There has, in fact, been some progress: nuclear arsenals dating from the Cold War era have been reduced by nearly 90 percent since the late 1980s. However, most importantly, to achieve our aim of a world without nuclear weapons, the nuclear-weapon states must be willing to proceed down this path. Here, we need greater determination, especially from the permanent Security Council members, that is, the United States, Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom.

It remains a long and difficult path. However, I caution against taking one supposed shortcut. Given the present-day security policy environment, a simple ban on nuclear weapons cannot and will not lead to actual disarmament, and it will not make the world a safer place. Such a ban won't lead to the scrapping of a single nuclear weapon.

That is why the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is and will remain the foundation of all efforts by the German Government towards nuclear disarmament. We believe there is a severe risk that the by and large successful NPT with its instruments and binding commitments would be undermined by a nuclear weapons ban.

Since entering into force in 1968, the NPT has prevented numerous countries from going nuclear. In some instances, it has even convinced countries to reduce their nuclear stockpiles.

The German Government has decided it does not wish to join any effort to ban nuclear weapons that would undermine the NPT and the key role it plays.

North Korea's nuclear weapon and missile programme is becoming an ever greater threat to world peace. North Korea is the only country that is conducting nuclear tests in the 21st century – two of them in the past few months alone. In this highly dangerous situation, the strict sanctions regime adopted by the

UN

Security Council and the

EU

against North Korea must be rigorously implemented.

What is completely unacceptable, even barbaric, is the repeated and continued use of chemical weapons in Syria and in Iraq. These horrible, taboo-breaking attacks require a determined response. There must be clear consequences for those who are responsible. We therefore supported the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the

OPCW

and the United Nations in 2016 by providing personnel and funding.

One of the greatest threats to world peace is the danger of weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists. Regarding Libya, the German Government last year participated in an international operation to remove the remnants of Libya's remaining chemical weapons stocks, thereby ensuring that these could not be seized by the terrorist

organisation IS. These substances will be destroyed at special facilities in Germany by the end of this year.

Cluster munitions are still being employed in conflicts, for example in Syria and in Yemen. How awful! This type of weapon must finally be universally banned and prohibited. We are also strongly engaged on this issue. That is why in September 2016 we assumed the Presidency of the Convention on Cluster Munitions for one year.

Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), which we often refer to as drones, also require regulation. When algorithms make life-or-death decisions without any human control, this raises difficult ethical, legal and political questions. In 2016, negotiations that were led by Germany resulted in agreement on a mandate for a group of governmental experts who have been tasked with swiftly determining the modus operandi for creating reliable and binding rules under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

We cannot be satisfied with what has been achieved. But this should spur us on to keep up our disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation efforts. That is what you expect us to do. That is what our fellow citizens expect us to do. I thank all of you for your broad-based support over the last four years. You can rest assured that the Foreign Minister, I myself, and the Federal Foreign Office will remain your reliable partners in this regard.

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