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Reports on recent IPU specialized meetings

(e) Parliamentary Roundtable during the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons

9 December 2014 – Vienna, Austria

On 9 December 2014, the Austrian Parliament hosted a Parliamentary Roundtable on Parliamentary Actions for a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (PNND).

The Roundtable, held as a side event of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, was based on the notion that parliamentarians had a special responsibility to ensure that governments represented the common will of humanity for a nuclear-weapon-free world, and to ensure that governments implemented their obligations to achieve that.

The Roundtable focused on actions that could be taken by members of parliament around the world to eliminate nuclear weapons in security doctrines and support negotiations for nuclear abolition. It brought together parliamentarians from over a dozen countries from Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, the Pacific and the Middle East, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Participants shared examples of parliamentary action and discussed ideas and strategies for further action.

The Parliamentary Roundtable was opened by the Chair and Member of the Austrian National Council, Ms. Christine Muttonen, who also serves as Co-President of PNND. Ms. Muttonen reminded the participants of the 21st Universal Peace Conference, which had been planned to take place in Vienna 100 years previously and organized by the Austrian Nobel Peace Prize laureates Bertha von Suttner and Alfred Hermann Fried. However, because of the outbreak of World War I, the Conference had never taken place and today the world was still far from stability, security and peace. Ms. Muttonen especially highlighted the danger posed by over 16,000 nuclear weapons and urged parliamentarians to raise awareness of the issue, work with civil society and call on their governments to continue working for a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Ms. L.A. Rojas-Hernandez, MP (Mexico), highlighted the importance of a security doctrine without nuclear weapons and how this could be achieved through nuclear-weapon-free zones. She cited as an example the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which had created the first nuclear-weapon-free zone and to which all 33 countries in Latin America are signatories, and called for the creation of similar zones in Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Mr. V. Rogalev, MP (Kazakhstan), and Council Member of the PNND, reminded the participants of the nuclear weapons testing done by the Soviet Union in Kazakhstan and of the catastrophic humanitarian and environment impact of these tests on current and future generations. He also spoke about the ATOM project, an international nuclear abolition campaign launched at the PNND Assembly in 2012 and led by citizens suffering from radiation exposure.

Mr. M. Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), highlighted the IPU resolution which had been adopted in March 2014 on the contribution of parliaments to the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. The resolution, which was supported by all IPU Member Parliaments, including those possessing nuclear weapons and under nuclear deterrence doctrines, calls for the elimination of the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines and the start of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention or package of agreements. Mr. Chungong called on parliamentarians to adopt national laws prohibiting nuclear weapons and highlighted other ways in which parliamentarians could work towards a nuclear-weapon-free world. He noted that the IPU has sent every parliament the *Handbook on Supporting Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament*, co-produced with PNND to assist parliaments in this endeavour.

Mr. R. van Riet, PNND UK Coordinator, Coordinator of the World Future Council's Disarmament Programme and co-editor of the PNND-IPU handbook, gave examples of how parliamentarians were engaging in nuclear disarmament, by adopting prohibition legislation, supporting initiatives at the United Nations and using their budgetary powers to cut funding for nuclear weapons programmes or investments in nuclear weapons corporations. He also mentioned that PNND members were raising greater awareness by organizing events and debates in parliament showcasing the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and nuclear accidents.

Mr. M. Robson, former New Zealand Minister for Disarmament, discussed New Zealand's national prohibition legislation. He noted that extended nuclear deterrence used to be a cornerstone of New Zealand's security policy – through the ANZUS military alliance, which had enjoyed public support due to threat perceptions and history. However, the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear tests in the Pacific and the strengthening of UN cooperative security mechanisms had altered public opinion and led to almost universal support for the non-nuclear policy. This is a good example of how other countries that are currently wedded to nuclear deterrence could change.

Mr. J. Corbyn, MP (United Kingdom) and Vice-Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, welcomed the fact that the United Kingdom and the United States were participating in the Vienna Conference and urged the other nuclear-weapon States to attend the next one. Mr. Corbyn reported on questions and debates he and other PNND UK members had introduced in Parliament to successfully push the UK Government to attend the Vienna Conference, as well as on other key issues such as challenging the planned renewal and extension of the Trident nuclear weapons system. Mr. Corbyn also called for parliamentarians to strengthen their action in support of the establishment of a Middle East Zone Free from Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Mr. J.-M. Collin, PNND France Coordinator, focused on nuclear-armed States and called for an international mechanism to ensure that States comply with international treaties on nuclear disarmament. Mr. Collin also noted that nuclear disarmament was politically difficult because nuclear weapons are often still seen as a sign of power. Therefore, a change of mind-set was needed to abolish nuclear weapons. The first step in France had been to open a discussion in the French National Assembly and Senate, which PNND had done through cross-party events. Mr. Collin presented a letter to the Vienna Conference from 11 French parliamentarians from different parties. Mr. Hervé Morin, former Defence Minister of France, was among those endorsing the letter.

Mr. Y. Komizo, General Secretary of Mayors for Peace, highlighted the importance of cooperation between parliamentarians and mayors as well as the power of public opinion. Both could help to ensure that the commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world, which was publicly supported by all, was followed through.

Mr. S. Heinze, representative of the ICAN Civil Society Forum, focused on the cooperation between civil society and parliamentarians, and called for greater involvement of civil society in conferences and meetings.

Ms. T. Cronberg, Co-President of PNND, offered an outlook on future political opportunities for joint parliamentary action to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world. She called on parliamentarians to work towards greater compliance with international nuclear disarmament treaties and to invest the money currently being used for the development of nuclear weapons, in humanitarian projects and in combating climate change.

The keynote presentations were followed by an open and constructive debate. Mr. A. Robertson (Member of Parliament, Scotland) presented a formal letter to the Vienna Conference from Ms. N. Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland. The letter noted that the entire UK nuclear fleet and nuclear weapons were stationed in Scotland, despite the overwhelming opposition to nuclear weapons by the Scottish Parliament and public.

Mr. M.U. Khan Badal, MP (Bangladesh), Chair of the PNND Bangladesh Section, underscored Bangladesh's situation of being surrounded by nuclear-weapon States. He outlined the steps Bangladesh had taken nationally and internationally to support nuclear disarmament, and the intention of the Bangladesh Parliament to take further action with respect to the threat from nuclear weapons in the South Asia region. He lamented the resources being dedicated to nuclear weapons, welcomed the Smarter Approach to Nuclear Expenditure (SANE) Act submitted to the US Senate by PNND Co-President Ed Markey, and suggested that the SANE Act slogan "freeze the nukes, fund the future," be used more widely to garner support among civil society.

Mr. P. Dewar, MP (Canada), PNND Co-President, called for an inventory of nuclear 'hot spots', including those where nuclear weapons were tested and used, those where they are deployed, and regions where there are conflicts which involve a risk of nuclear weapons use. He called for greater cooperation amongst parliamentarians worldwide to highlight these and to advance non-nuclear security.

Mr. G. Asadoloahi, MP (Islamic Republic of Iran), noted that the possession, threat or use of nuclear weapons would be against the fundamental principles of Islam, and reassured participants of Iran's commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world. Mr. R. Norouzi, MP, highlighted Iranian policy supporting a Middle East free of nuclear weapons.

Mr. A.A. Maddison, MP (Marshall Islands), former President of PNND, pointed out the Marshall Islands stood as a sad example of the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons – citing a huge increase in stillbirths, cancers and birth deformities, and the fact that those consequences would continue for many generations. Ms. Maddison also called on parliamentarians to ask their governments to support the Marshall Islands case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the non-compliance of nuclear-armed States with their nuclear disarmament obligation.

Mr. M. Ceric, representative of Religions for Peace, highlighted the need for religious differences and differences between countries to be resolved through respect, understanding and common security rather than by the threat or use of force. He noted that Religions for Peace had published a Resource Guide on Nuclear Disarmament for Religious Leaders and Communities, authored by Alyn Ware, which highlighted the connections between religious faiths and the need for nuclear abolition. He noted that religion should not dominate politics – nor should it be separate – and therefore encouraged closer cooperation between religious leaders and politicians.

Dr. U. Finckh-Krämer, MP (Germany), reported that debate on the role of nuclear weapons within NATO was mostly undertaken by government officials behind closed doors. Parliamentarians were not invited to engage in the policy debates, nor were they informed officially of the existence or deployment policies of nuclear weapons in NATO nuclear-sharing countries. Parliamentarians from NATO Member States should raise nuclear deterrence issues and find ways to influence their governments more effectively to make progress on nuclear disarmament.

Mr. D. Pacheco, MP (Portugal), noted that nuclear deterrence doctrines arose from genuine security concerns. He asked how countries that currently relied on nuclear deterrence could address those security concerns in other ways – including through cooperative security. He also asked how PNND was working with NATO and parliamentarians from nuclear-armed States on those issues.

Mr. M. Kulasegaran, MP (Malaysia), noted the strong support of the international community for the proposal for a nuclear weapons convention and asked about the relationship between that and other proposals.

Ms. M. Willard, representative of United Religious Initiative (URI), presented the URI Call to Conscience, which states that “The use of a nuclear weapon against any State is inhumane and useless against terrorists. We cannot hold life sacred and at the same time seek security by placing its entirety at risk.” She supported Mr. Ceric’s call for religious communities to work with parliamentarians, especially through PNND, to gain political traction for a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Dr. V. Shankar, PNND Coordinator for India, suggested that the humanitarian impact dimension of the issue should logically lead to a ban on use of nuclear weapons as a step towards a nuclear weapons convention. He asked why countries such as Austria, Ireland and Norway, who are at the forefront of the humanitarian consequences initiative, were not supporting the Indian resolution at the United Nations calling for negotiations on an international convention to prohibit the use of nuclear weapons.

Mr. A. Ware, PNND Global Coordinator, responded to some of the comments and questions. With regard to the Marshall Islands case at the ICJ, he noted that the Court had sent a letter to every State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) indicating that the Marshall Islands versus the United Kingdom case involved the issue of implementation of the NPT, and thus all States Parties had a right to join the case through intervention.

In response to the questions from Mr. Pacheco, Mr. Ware noted that PNND was indeed advancing cooperative security frameworks for addressing security issues. In regions such as North-East Asia and the Middle East, that includes promotion of Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones. Globally, it meant advancing the new platform: UNFOLD ZERO, which highlighted UN forums and approaches for resolving security issues and thus reducing the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines.

Mr. Ware reported that PNND was actively engaging with nuclear-armed States. PNND had co-presidents from France, India, United Kingdom and the United States, council members from Israel and Pakistan and a former co-president from the Russian Federation. PNND had organized events and actions in the parliaments of many of the nuclear-armed States, including its annual assemblies.

In response to Mr. Kulasegaran, Mr. Ware referred to the paper from the Basel Peace Office (circulated at the meeting) entitled *Making Sense of Nuclear Abolition Initiatives*, which outlined the main proposals for negotiations (nuclear weapons convention, framework of agreements, ban treaty, building blocks, ban on use followed by elimination, etc.) and which ones were being advanced by each of the main international campaigns or networks, including Abolition 2000, Global Zero, ICAN, Mayors for Peace and UNFOLD ZERO.

In response to Mr. Shankar, Mr. Ware highlighted the paper produced by the Basel Peace Office (and circulated at the roundtable), *From nuclear taboo to a prohibition (ban) on use: The next step to a nuclear-weapon-free world*, which supported the proposal for negotiations to prohibit nuclear-weapons-use.

In her closing remarks *Ms. Muttonen* urged parliamentarians to connect with each other for the benefit of a nuclear-weapon-free world, especially through PNND. Furthermore, she suggested the establishment of an international control mechanism for nuclear disarmament and asked parliamentarians to cooperate more closely on the issue within the framework of the IPU, OSCE-PA and NATO-PA and to also involve civil society in the process.