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TOWARDS A NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE WORLD: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARLIAMENTS

***Explanatory memorandum submitted by the co-Rapporteurs
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1. For more than six decades, nuclear weapons have posed significant challenges for the international community. While the overall number of nuclear weapons in the world has been reduced since the height of the Cold War, the number of States that possess them has grown. Despite the fact that the vast majority of countries have committed to preventing the proliferation of these weapons, many are concerned that progress towards a nuclear-weapon-free world has been too slow.

2. The draft resolution that the co-Rapporteurs have prepared for consideration by delegates to the 130th IPU Assembly puts forward what we believe is a shared conviction: that there is an urgent need to strengthen parliamentary contributions to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament as part of the process of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. This same conviction was evident in the panel discussion held at the 129th IPU Assembly (Geneva, October 2013). It was also reflected in the written submissions provided by Member Parliaments and others in the weeks that followed; we thank those that provided such input. For this reason, the draft resolution begins by stating unequivocally that the Assembly is “convinced of the need to achieve and maintain a nuclear-weapon-free world”.

3. The draft resolution begins by outlining the key principles of an international framework for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It then emphasizes strategies for moving forward, based on actions and key steps that we believe can unite parliamentarians and allow us to make effective, immediate and realizable contributions to common goals. The draft resolution also encourages parliamentarians to engage in dialogue in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, including on specific issues where views may currently diverge. The overall tone of the draft resolution is therefore intended to reflect a sense of urgency, implying an impatience for faster and deeper progress.

4. The draft resolution is designed to build on previous IPU work, in particular the comprehensive resolution adopted at the 120th IPU Assembly (Addis Ababa, April 2009). That resolution dealt in detail with a wide range of instruments and processes through which governments and parliamentarians can help achieve nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Rather than restating all of the undertakings to which we already agreed in 2009, it is our view that the goal of the resolution we adopt at the 130th Assembly should be to update, where necessary, and build on the essence of this existing body of work. Such a strategy can only reinforce the commitments we have already made, while sending a clear message about the efforts and initiatives that we believe require our greatest attention today in order to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world.

5. As was the case with the 2009 resolution, this draft resolution recognizes the importance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It does so because the NPT embodies the international consensus on the need to pursue the interrelated pillars of disarmament, non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It is for this reason that the draft resolution calls for the universalization of the NPT and full compliance with all of its obligations. The draft resolution similarly emphasizes the need for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which is another key instrument for advancing nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It urges those States identified in Annex 2 of the Treaty that have not yet done so to accelerate the process of signing and ratifying this instrument as a matter of priority and an indication of their political will and commitment to international peace and security.

6. The draft resolution acknowledges that disarmament initiatives can be pursued through unilateral, bilateral and multilateral frameworks and actions, as was stated by many of the participants in the panel session in Geneva. The draft resolution also takes into account developments since 2009 and new opportunities. It expresses encouragement at the emergence in the past two years of new multilateral initiatives and approaches to nuclear disarmament negotiations, such as the Open-ended Working Group established by the United Nations General Assembly. It also welcomes the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament held on 26 September 2013.

7. We recognize that most of the actions needed to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world must ultimately be carried out by governments. However, parliamentarians are in a unique position to play a vital role. We therefore intended for this draft resolution to focus on the roles that parliamentarians can and must play. These include ensuring that governments abide by existing commitments and obligations in the areas of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all its aspects. Parliamentarians can also apply pressure on their governments so as to encourage them to contribute to other practical actions, such as negotiating a fissile material cut-off treaty, strengthening and expanding existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, and establishing new ones.

8. In addition to oversight and legislative functions, the draft resolution emphasizes the essential contribution parliamentarians can make through public education and by raising awareness about the continuing dangers of, and the need to totally eliminate, nuclear weapons. It also emphasizes the need for parliamentarians to cooperate with each other, and with governments and civil society, in an effort to generate and mobilize the political will needed to achieve further nuclear disarmament.

9. The draft resolution reflects our agreement, as co-Rapporteurs, on a range of important issues. While there are a few areas in respect of which we were not able to reach agreement on specific language, we feel that the draft provides a solid basis for the debate that will take place at the 130th IPU Assembly. The Assembly offers us the opportunity to provide a strong, clear and resolute parliamentary contribution to international efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, with the goal of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. It is important to emphasize that the draft resolution makes it clear that the IPU has a critical role to play in this regard. It concludes by calling on parliamentarians to use the IPU as a global forum to focus political attention on the need for effective, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament, and on concrete and practical actions that can be taken in the immediate future to advance this goal.