

**Statement by**  
**His Excellency Mr Edgars Rinkēvičs,**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia,**  
**At the Conference on Disarmament**  
**Geneva, 23/24 (*date not yet confirmed*) February 2021**

---

Mr. President,

I would like to congratulate Brasilia on assuming the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, and express Latvia`s full support and cooperation.

Despite last year`s headlines being so concentrated on the COVID-19 pandemic, international hostile-minded actors are not inactive even if they do not make the headlines.

We have plenty of examples that inaction or lack of progress on our part means further encouragement of actions contrary to our common values.

One of the most striking examples highlighting our errors of omission was the attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny. Such despicable acts are a strong reminder that not all actors observe the Chemical Weapons Convention. Their behavior poses a serious threat to the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime. We commend efforts by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its Technical Secretariat in competently and professionally investigating such cases. The international community has been increasingly vocal in demanding an answer to these threats. And much more action is needed.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year. It is the cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It is also the most effective tool for countering the existential risk of nuclear weapons. The NPT Review Conference has been repeatedly delayed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

However, with the considerable challenges we face, we must make sure that these delays do not impact our commitment. Those challenges are growing. They range from worrying actions by Iran in breach of the JCPOA, to the evolving nuclear arsenal of the North Korean regime.

I must also mention the humanitarian consequences stemming from the use of conventional weapons in conflicts and violence around the globe. Armed clashes have continued throughout the pandemic and each lost life has been a life too many. Some international instruments for transparency and confidence building have suffered setbacks, such as the Open Skies Treaty. Others, like the OSCE Vienna Document, are often followed in letter, but not in spirit. Those international norms need to be fully observed and respected. We encourage constant attention to this issue.

Mr. President,

It is not easy to begin anew and rise to the occasion. But these examples are evidence of the need for constructive engagement. I believe that this moment is well suited for such action. We are making progress in the fight against the pandemic. We are multiplying our efforts to address climate change. This trend should continue in the field of disarmament and nonproliferation. The starting impulse has already been given. The U.S. and Russia have extended the New START Treaty for another five years, allowing us to broaden our focus and increase our ambitions.

This was a welcome move. However, the most promising aspect of this recent agreement has been the idea of further talks on arms control, including with other states. Without progress, there is stagnation and in disarmament and nonproliferation such a maxim holds true. We must engage proactively and prepare for the future today. We should not only react to challenges. We need to actually develop a system that eliminates them or is strong enough to respond to them on its own.

Mr. President,

The NPT Review Conference offers the opportunity to be proactive, imaginative and even bold. We need to continue constructive paths forward, such as implementing the NPT Action Plan of 2010. But we should also pursue other substantive avenues for progress. These might include increased coordination among the UN Security Council five permanent members, but also new approaches to verification and transparency or innovative ideas about strengthening the global non-proliferation regime.

It is also important to continue future-oriented efforts in accordance with our obligations and existing goals. The entry into force of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty is important. And so are immediate and substantive negotiations in the Conference on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty. However, these targets remain elusive. It is proof that our cooperation must be improved.

Furthermore, we have to change our approach and evolve. Our view must be broad, yet constructive. We need to fully fund, universalize and support the conventions negotiated in this Conference. And we need to work on a range of other issues and new areas of engagement. For example, emerging and disruptive technologies.

Mr. President,

Last year I illustrated the danger of falling into the trap of low ambitions and a permanent *status quo* saddled with growing bureaucratic issues. This is the primary reason why here today I am advocating proactive engagement and future-oriented thinking.

For arms control and disarmament to be effective, all parties need to abide by the rules. However, to counter malicious actors, we have to further develop these rules. We need to strengthen them and prepare them for turbulent and unpredictable times.

I encourage the Conference to utilize its historic combination of diplomatic effort and political will. Its effectiveness has to be renewed and the membership of the Conference has to be expanded. Universalization is crucial, if we are to talk of progress and a role for this format in engaging with issues of the future.

Mr. President,

The return to effectiveness for the Conference is no longer a wish or a hope. It is now a question of necessity. Let us begin the work.

Thank you.