

National Statement of the Republic of Malta for the High-Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament

Delivered by Hon. Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Evarist Bartolo

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Dear President,
Colleagues,

It is my honour to address this high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament as we come together to discuss the most pertinent issues and recent developments in the world of disarmament.

Malta welcomes the recent announcement by the United States and Russia informing of the agreed extension of the NEW START Treaty for five additional years. In striving for global disarmament, Malta attaches the highest importance to the NEW START Treaty as the only remaining bilateral nuclear arms control agreement between the two major nuclear powers.

The extension of this treaty gains more importance when understood in the current political scenario. Firstly, the United States and Russia, as the two biggest possessors of nuclear arms, ran the risk of having no legally binding, verifiable limits on each others' arsenal for the first time since 1972. Secondly, we have recently witnessed the worrying erosion of major disarmament architecture, the result of an ever-growing climate of friction and distrust.

In this regard, Malta attaches the highest importance to the New START Treaty and regards it as a crucial contribution to international and European security. The reduction of deployed strategic nuclear arsenals under the New START Treaty, enhanced notably by its robust verification mechanism, contributes to some well needed trust and predictability.

Through its verifiable, legal limits set on the numbers of deployed strategic nuclear weapons and on deployed and non-deployed missiles, bombers and launchers, the treaty increases mutual confidence, resulting in enhanced regional and global security.

As such, This development augurs well for all states globally since it is a known fact that no country, big or small, would be immune to the devastating effects that would transcend national borders since nuclear weapons were ever to be deployed again, by intention or accident.

Malta equally embraces this extension in terms of its contribution to the implementation of both states' nuclear disarmament obligations under Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which we perceive as the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. By increasing predictability and mutual confidence amongst the two largest nuclear weapon States, this Treaty limits strategic competition and increases strategic stability.

We strongly believe that this renewal should only be the start of a greater effort towards disarmament and further cooperation between the United States and Russia. This should ultimately lead to additional agreements, ideally to the conclusion of a broader agreement that would cover all nuclear weapons, including non-strategic nuclear weapons and new types of nuclear armaments.

Malta encourages the United States and Russia to build on this diplomatic momentum as to allow for further progress in nuclear reduction talks with other states. This extension demonstrates the mutual benefits of cooperation which should similarly be the focus of future diplomacy on wider disarmament-related issues. In light of recent worrying news, we hope for major powers to act as catalysts and generate a wind of change which bolsters the international political environment thereby strengthening international peace.

In this regard, Malta welcomes the incoming US administration and is encouraged by the initial signs of serious desire to cooperate on issues of disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. We look forward for the incoming administration to intensify its negotiation efforts with other world leaders in addressing global challenges in the area of nuclear proliferation, noticeably but not limited to, the status of the JCPOA and the situation with DPRK.

Mr President,

This new year has commenced on a relatively positive note in terms of nuclear issues as we have finally witnessed some encouraging steps forward in disarmament related diplomacy. In addition to the NEW START Treaty's extension, earlier this year, the entry into force of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came as the first comprehensive global ban on nuclear arms and strengthened the global norm against the worst of weapons of mass destruction.

While these are notable achievements, our efforts should not stop here as we still find ourselves at a critical juncture. Ensuring the success of the TPNW is now our collective responsibility. It is our duty to promote the benefits of such treaty, help fight misconceptions about it, and ensure that its obligations are adhered to. Similarly, the cooperative attitudes required for the NEW START Treaty's extension is a demonstration of the political will required going into the upcoming NPT review conference. In strengthening the remaining disarmament architecture and embracing a multilateral approach to security, we can further guarantee a safer and more prosperous future for humanity.

In conclusion, the indications are there that while the risks remain, more cooperative times are upon us and we should grasp this opportunity with both hands as to bring a halt to the degradation of

arms control treaties. The possession of nuclear weapons by a select number of states not only acts as a major source of political anxiety to the wider international community but presents an existential threat to humanity. The recent progress has the potential to stimulate further action on disarmament and as states seeking prosperity through peace, it is crucial to capitalize on this and move closer towards a world without nuclear weapons, a world where the spirit of dialogue and combined-effort trumps that of belligerence and intimidation.

Thank you.