Seventy years ago, the explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki obliterated tens of thousands of lives in seconds. By contrast, the process of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation – as I know only too well from serving as United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs – moves more at the speed of continental drifts. The Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has not implemented a programme of work in nearly 20 years, ever since it debated the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the UN Disarmament Commission in New York has not agreed on anything since 1999.

The year 2015 presented formidable challenges in terms of nuclear disarmament: heightened tensions between Russia and the United States saw the deployment of new nuclear missiles, increased bomber flights from both sides, as well as large-scale nuclear modernization programmes. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May ended without agreement on a final document. And, more recently, North Korea hinted that it might conduct another nuclear test in October to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the Korean Workers’ Party.

But in the midst of these dark clouds, let us focus on some bright spots. The agreement on a Comprehensive Plan of Action between the E3/EU +3 countries and Iran reached in July has shown that a commitment to persevere in multilateral diplomacy and the willingness to negotiate can lead to a mutually acceptable agreement. The inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency will show whether it is also a durable one.

The issue of verification is clearly key to building trust in any nuclear arms control agreement. Through its International Monitoring System, the worldwide system of seismic, hydroacoustic, infrasound and radionuclide stations, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) provides its Member States with the confidence that no nuclear test will go unnoticed.

The broad participation of different parts of society makes me hopeful that the remaining eight States will move forward with ratification. With the notable exception of North Korea, nuclear testing is not an issue in any of these eight countries, let alone anywhere else in the world.

Still, achieving entry into force will be no easy feat. But to paraphrase the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius, who died in Austria in 180 C.E.: Just because something seems difficult to you, do not think it impossible to accomplish. That is the spirit in which we must continue to pursue an ambitious disarmament agenda.