

# Overcoming the disarmament malaise

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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 tremendous success of the CTBT in stopping nuclear testing – even before having entered into force – is due largely to this unique system. This year, the CTBTO installed its 300<sup>th</sup> station, bringing the system a step closer to its final configuration of 337 facilities.

However, this should not make us complacent. The fact that the CTBT remains in a legal limbo also has repercussions for its verification regime. Its most powerful verification element – namely on-site inspections – will become operational only once the remaining eight Annex 2 States have signed and ratified.

There should be no more delays in bringing the CTBT into full legal standing. I am convinced that a legally binding ban on nuclear tests will also bring us considerably closer to outlawing and eliminating nuclear arms altogether. Weapons that are illegal to test should also be illegal to possess.

Many States are frustrated with the lack of progress on the issue of nuclear disarmament and have voiced their demands through efforts aimed at finding new approaches to eliminate nuclear weapons. Most prominent among these is the humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament, which underscores the devastating human impact of nuclear weapons and is also grounded in international humanitarian law. This approach is supported by a clear majority of UN Member States, as illustrated by the 158 countries – including two nuclear-weapon States, the United Kingdom and the United States – that attended the third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, hosted by Austria last December.

The humanitarian approach has energized the debate around nuclear disarmament and has brought together not only government officials and NGOs, but a range of players not traditionally associated with disarmament, from human rights groups to environmentalists.

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.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



### ANGELA KANE

has served as UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs since 2012. Previous UN posts included Under-Secretary-General for Management from 2008 to 2012 and Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs from 2005 to 2008. Prior to that, Kane served as Director in the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Public Information. Her prior experience also includes the positions of Principal Officer for Political Affairs with the UN Secretary-General, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and a special assignment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.