NEW ZEALAND MISSION to the UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION

FIRST COMMITTEE (DISARMAMENT)

STATEMENT BY THE NEW ZEALAND REPRESENTATIVE
DEBORAH PANCKHURST

MONDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2002

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
Mr Chairman,

First of all let me congratulate you on assuming the Chair. You have New Zealand's full co-operation in what we hope will be a productive session.

Mr Chairman, the fragility of international security was all too well demonstrated to us last year with the terrorist attacks on this our host city and country. The events of 11 September and threats of possible use of weapons of mass destruction, serve to remind us that here in the First Committee there can be no room for complacency in our work.

New Zealand has consistently sought to push the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation agenda forward. Now, during this time of increased uncertainty, is not a time when States should be pulling back from multilateral initiatives. Instead we should be reinvigorating these efforts. As New Zealand's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hon Phil Goff, said during this year's General Assembly debate: "It is essential that we renew our commitment to multilateralism as the best way to address global problems." In other words, collective problems require collective solutions.

At the cornerstone of New Zealand's disarmament policy is a drive for a world free of nuclear weapons. We have continued to work with our New Agenda Coalition partners towards real and substantive action being taken on the 13 Steps agreed to at the 2000 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In this regard, we welcome the news of Cuba's intention to accede to the NPT and urge those few countries still outside the Treaty to follow Cuba's example, and accede as non-nuclear weapon states, as soon as possible.

As already outlined by the distinguished Ambassador of Ireland, the New Agenda Coalition this year will be proposing two resolutions. The first resolution, entitled: "Towards a nuclear weapon free world: the need for a new
agenda" outlines the necessary steps to confront the threats that are posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This resolution is not only an opportunity for States to demonstrate commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons. It presents also an opportunity to demonstrate that the First Committee’s work is relevant and useful. It is a comprehensive account of progress to date on nuclear disarmament negotiations and furthermore sets out a plan for future action. In 2000, much of this plan gained the support of 187 states.

An important step in the Programme of Action agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference was the "further reduction of non-strategic nuclear weapons". The second Resolution that has been tabled by the Ambassador of Ireland on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition will, we hope, be the first move towards addressing this important issue. In some respects, short-range tactical nuclear weapons pose a greater threat than strategic weapons, as there is a real risk that tactical nuclear weapons could be launched by accident or in the confusion of war, with no time available for communication between opposing sides. There are worries too about the security of tactical nuclear weapons.

Mr Chairman, the first and crucial step of the Programme of Action agreed at the 2002 NPT Review Conference - the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty - is still not within sight. The CTBT is a contribution towards the systematic reduction of nuclear weapons and the prevention of nuclear proliferation by ridding the world of nuclear weapons test explosions. The failure so far to bring into force this fundamental step towards non-proliferation and disarmament threatens to undermine the credibility of disarmament negotiations.

New Zealand declared itself and its waters a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in 1987 with the passage of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act. The South Pacific is also a NWFZ and there are other NWFZs around the world. We support Brazil’s initiative to join the NWFZs in the Southern Hemisphere to create a Southern Hemisphere free of nuclear weapons. This is in no way an attempt to impinge on the rights all States
enjoy under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, but would comprise a positive act of common purpose.

Just over a year ago, in this city, the international community agreed on a Programme of Action to deal with the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its aspects. New Zealand supported this Programme of Action and we remain firm in our commitment to tackle the flow of these weapons around the world. Small Arms and Light Weapons are real-time killers and they pose grave humanitarian, developmental and social challenges. New Zealand supports the implementation of the provisions set out in the Programme of Action and we are working with partners in our region towards this end.

It is an issue of deep concern to New Zealand that the preparations for the resumed Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention, scheduled to take place in November this year, are in difficulty. States have negotiated for years towards the development and implementation of a compliance mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention. The technology and science that feeds into biosecurity and bioterrorism is being rapidly developed. But while the United Nations is still struggling to identify and eliminate biological weapons developed in one State, and we have witnessed the use of BW in another State, we have been unable to bring the negotiation for a system of verification and compliance to completion.

Mr Chairman, 2002 has been a challenging year for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The process of changing the leadership of the Technical Secretariat was a difficult one for all of us, but we are confident that the new Director General, Rogelio Pfrirter of Argentina, has the skills to take the OPCW forwards. He has made a fine start.

2003 can be expected to present challenges as well. Member States must seize the opportunity provided by the First Review Conference of the Chemical weapons Convention to give tangible effect to our determination, "for the sake of all [hu]mankind," to "exclude completely the possibility of the
use of chemical weapons”. That is surely our task, and we should not fool ourselves that it is complete.

It continues to be a major disappointment to New Zealand that yet again the Conference on Disarmament has failed to agree on a Programme of Work. It is a great pity that linkages between issues should be allowed to hold the CD to ransom. At a time when other international organisations have opened to the participation of NGOs and broadest memberships, we find the CD out of step with reality and with the aspirations of civil society.

Mr Chairman, in direct contrast to the Conference on Disarmament is the Ottawa Convention banning the use of anti-personnel mines. New Zealand remains a steadfast supporter of the Ottawa Convention. The co-operative and constructive spirit in which States Parties and NGOs have come together to work towards the total elimination of anti-personnel mines is heartening and it shows that when States are determined, progress can be achieved. New Zealand, along with Australia, continues to work with Pacific Island Countries to achieve the complete universalisation of the Convention in the South Pacific. Anti-personnel mines are not employed in the South Pacific so we have some administrative tidying to do.

While we can take satisfaction from the work that has been done on anti-personnel mines, there remains much to do on explosive remnants of war. These objects are often a direct danger to life and limb and an obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian aid, the cultivation of agricultural land and the rebuilding of communities that have been devastated by war. In the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, New Zealand strongly supports the work of the Group of Governmental Experts in Geneva.

Finally, New Zealand is a strong supporter of the UN Experts Group on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education. Dr Kate Dewes, Vice President of the International Peace Bureau, was appointed by the Secretary-General as the New Zealand expert on the Group. We are convinced that the dissemination of information on disarmament and the raising of awareness
about disarmament in general are essential in order to ensure that future generations steer our world away from conflict and towards peace.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.