UNGA 64: FIRST COMMITTEE

THEMATIC DEBATE: NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Statement by Dell Higie
Ambassador for Disarmament

14 October 2009

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Mr Chairman,

New Zealand welcomes the renewed global focus on a nuclear-weapon-free world. The leadership recently shown by leaders, including through the UN Security Council Summit and its Resolution 1887, provides much needed momentum in the lead up to next year’s NPT Review Conference. The Review Conference comes at a critical juncture in our efforts to sustain work on all pillars of the Treaty, including of course on the undertakings made by the nuclear weapons states to nuclear disarmament.

New Zealand welcomes the reiteration in Resolution 1887 of Article VI of the NPT – the obligation to pursue negotiations on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament. In our view, those effective measures are not just about the numbers, although quantitative reductions are of course an important element. They must also include practical and transparent steps that collectively lessen the role of nuclear weapons in national security strategies.

The operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems is an important element of nuclear doctrine. As colleagues will be aware, the “de-alerting group”, of which New Zealand is part, has decided not to present its resolution on operational readiness this year. This decision was not taken lightly. It reflects our recognition of the very positive momentum that exists currently and the genuine willingness of many states to explore concrete steps to achieve the ‘Prague vision’. Our group’s decision is intended to allow space for the various review processes underway to reach a positive outcome. Nonetheless, we remain strongly committed to promoting the decreased readiness of nuclear weapons systems and we will be working for a satisfactory outcome on this issue at both the NPT Review Conference and the First Committee next year.

Mr Chairman,

New Zealand is proud to be associated with resolutions put forward by the New Agenda Coalition on nuclear disarmament, and by Australia and Mexico on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The CTBT has a vital place in today’s multilateral framework for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, with a strong contribution to make to global security. Its entry into force would be a major step toward a world free of nuclear weapons and we welcome the confidence of High Representative Sergio Duarte in saying yesterday that its entry into force “might not be far away”. In this regard, we note with pleasure the commitment by the United States and the recent welcome expressions of support for ratification by China and Indonesia.

Another vital element in the process of nuclear disarmament is the commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile materials for weapons purposes. These negotiations must begin in earnest at the beginning of next year and we call on all countries to show the required flexibility to allow negotiations to commence. New Zealand is pleased to co-
sponsor the FMCT resolution at this First Committee and urges all states to support a strong text on this issue.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce our resolution on a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere, which is put forward jointly by Brazil and New Zealand. The resolution has been adopted by an overwhelming majority in past years and we look forward to an even stronger outcome this year.

We welcome the entry into force earlier this year of the Treaty of Pelindaba and note that the entire network of nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties which span the southern hemisphere is now in force.

Nuclear-weapon-free zones are a powerful demonstration of the strong collective will that exists at a regional level to rid the world of nuclear weapons. In this connection, we are cognisant of the fact that nuclear-weapon-free zones contribute strongly to both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation objectives. We look forward to further progress towards the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in other regions, especially in the Middle East.

As a strong advocate for these zones, New Zealand welcomes Chile’s leadership in organising the Second Conference of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone States Parties to be held on 30 April 2010, just in advance of the NPT RevCon. It will provide a valuable opportunity to explore ways of strengthening communication and collaboration within and between zones. New Zealand is pleased to support Chile’s resolution on this important meeting, one which we expect will also advance the objectives of the NPT Review Conference.

Mr Chairman,

Under the terms of the NPT, both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon States have complementary roles to play in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. New Zealand takes this obligation very seriously and continues to be active in countering nuclear proliferation risks in a number of contexts.

We are active participants in the Proliferation Security Initiative – we hosted a PSI exercise in Auckland last year; the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism – we are convening a GICNT national tabletop exercise next month; and are a long-standing contributor to the G8 Global Partnership. All these initiatives complement the treaty-based regime.

I have already spoken in the general debate last week about New Zealand’s unwavering commitment to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), demonstrated most recently through our chairing of this year’s General Conference. We remain highly concerned that, as pointed out by the IAEA Director General in his statement at the recent UN Security Council Summit, the
Agency's verification authority is either non-existent or inadequate in over 90 countries. This worrying situation must be rectified.

Mr Chairman,

As so many have said this week and in recent months, we are living in a time of great opportunity for nuclear disarmament. It is incumbent upon all of us, nuclear and non-nuclear-weapon states alike, to take this opportunity and turn it into action.