UNGA 65: FIRST COMMITTEE

THEMATIC DEBATE: NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Statement by Dell Higgin
Ambassador for Disarmament

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Check against delivery
Mr Chairman

New Zealand’s commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation is deep and enduring. Here in the First Committee, it is reflected through our ongoing membership of the New Agenda Coalition, through our co-ordinatorship of the Operational Readiness Group, our promotion – this year under Brazil’s stewardship – of the resolution on a nuclear-weapon-free southern hemisphere, and via our leadership on the CTBT resolution with Australia and Mexico.

Mr Chairman

This year’s NPT Review Conference outcome outlines a clear roadmap for action over the next five years to achieve progress towards our collective objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Nuclear and non-nuclear weapon States alike must seize this opportunity and begin work on implementing the Action Plan as a matter of priority.

New Zealand is doing its part. In addition to the activities noted above, we are looking closely at other elements in the Action Plan which New Zealand could usefully take forward.

In this connection, New Zealand’s Foreign Minister McCully, together with his Australian counterpart, wrote to the UN Secretary General providing suggestions on nuclear transparency to give effect to Action 21 of the NPT Review Conference Action Plan. This joint initiative will help fulfil the fourth of the Secretary General’s five proposals on nuclear disarmament: monitoring the systematic and progressive reduction of nuclear weapons by the nuclear-weapon States, as a step towards the fulfilment of their obligation to eliminate those weapons.

Mr Chairman

While we all have a responsibility to advance the NPT action plan, there are of course elements that fall most obviously to the responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States. We echo the calls of others that those States must take steps to implement their responsibilities as a matter of priority - and must keep the broader international community abreast of their efforts. In this connection we look forward to learning more about the meeting planned for spring next year in Paris and its projected outcomes.

Mr Chairman

New Zealand welcomes the commitment by the nuclear-weapon States in the NPT Review Conference Action Plan to “consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon States in further reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems”.

New Zealand will table a resolution this year entitled “Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems” together with the other members of our Group: Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Switzerland. This resolution carries forward
the text first tabled on this agenda item at the 62nd session of the General Assembly.

A number of changes have been made in this year’s text not only to reflect recent developments — such as the NPT Review Conference outcome — but also in response to the concerns that have been previously raised with the co-sponsors. It is the strong view of the co-sponsors that this year’s resolution should serve to raise the comfort levels of those countries that have withheld their support on the resolution previously - and we remain hopeful of a positive shift by many of those delegations. A positive shift on this resolution would provide further momentum to our collective efforts to our end goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

Mr Chairman

We were pleased that the NPT Review Conference reinforced the CTBT as a vital step on the road to the elimination of nuclear weapons. We are heartened by the impetus the Treaty has received in recent months through the announcements made by some of the remaining Annex 2 countries in regard to Treaty ratification.

Together with Australia and Mexico, New Zealand is pleased to table the annual resolution on the CTBT at this year’s First Committee. As in previous years, the resolution underscores the importance of entry into force of the CTBT.

The strong level of support the resolution has attracted in recent years is further recognition of the importance of the CTBT. The co-sponsors hope that that level of support will be repeated and even strengthened this year.

Mr Chairman

Ours is not an abstract endeavour: As High Representative Duarte said in the debate here yesterday "Let us never forget that the real beneficiaries of disarmament – and the real victims of its failure to be achieved – are human beings”.

The NPT Review Conference’s recognition of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons should further reinforce the need for all states to take urgent steps towards their elimination. New Zealand welcomes all efforts towards this goal.

Thank you Mr Chairman.