STATEMENT

by

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on behalf of the De-alerting group:
Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland and Sweden

at the

Nuclear Weapons Cluster of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly
First Committee
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Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the de-alerting group - Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland and my own country Sweden - on the issue of reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems, also referred to as de-alerting.

Our group has consistently called, both in the General Assembly and in the NPT, on States with nuclear weapons to take practical steps to address the significant number of nuclear weapons that remain on high alert.

The contribution that lowering the operational status of nuclear weapons can make to nuclear disarmament has been recognized for a long time. In the context of the NPT, the Thirteen Practical Steps of 2000 called for concrete agreed measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems. The 2010 NPT Action Plan further recognized the legitimate interest of non-nuclear-weapon States in this issue. These clear commitments have so far not been met.

In the General Assembly, the support for de-alerting has grown significantly over the last few years. The latest UN General Assembly resolution on de-alerting, adopted at its 71st session last year, reached its highest level of support yet: 175 states voted in favour of the resolution, with a significant number of states also co-sponsoring it - among them a group of states covered by extended nuclear deterrence. This sends a clear message about the need to renew efforts to ensure that the commitments to take nuclear weapons from high alert are fulfilled.

Mr Chairman,

It is true that that some nuclear weapon states have lowered the level of operational readiness of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Others do not keep their nuclear weapons on high alert. These are positive and encouraging steps. But more needs to be done.

Our group maintains its conviction that progress is required for a number of reasons. Lowering alert levels is a key element of nuclear risk reduction, as high alert levels significantly multiply the risks posed by nuclear weapons. Some of these risks include: inadvertent launches due to technical failure or operator error; possibility of misinterpretation of early warning data leading to intentional, but erroneous launches; failures of, and false reports by, early warning systems; use of nuclear weapons by unauthorised actors such as rogue military units, terrorists or cyber-attackers.

Mr. Chairman,

De-alerting is a core element of diminishing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in military and security concepts, doctrines and policies. As such, de-alerting is not only a disarmament measure, but also a significant contribution to non-proliferation, since continued emphasis on the importance of weapons on high alert could lead to false perceptions of nuclear weapons as desirable security instruments.
Nuclear weapon possessor states should consider de-alerting as a strategic step in deemphasizing the military role of nuclear weapons.

The link between high alert levels, associated risks and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences posed by nuclear weapons is clear. De-alerting should be pursued as an interim measure to diminish risks and hence increase human and international security.

The nuclear weapons states should urgently implement previously agreed commitments on de-alerting and take steps to rapidly reduce operational readiness – unilaterally, bilaterally or otherwise – with a view to ensuring that all nuclear weapons are removed from high alert status.

Mr Chairman,

Our message is by no means new. We have been persistently conveying it for years, both here at the First Committee of the General Assembly; the NPT, and other multilateral disarmament fora. The growing support for de-alerting is encouraging but must be translated into real changes in alert levels.

The nuclear weapon states should regularly report on their implementation of these commitments.

The de-alerting group will continue to focus its efforts on concrete elements that we believe can be achieved, not least in the on-going NPT review cycle.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion: the de-alerting group believes that concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament are essential. They are also long overdue. Particularly in the current security climate, risk reduction measures - including de-alerting - should be prominent on our agenda.

Let us all use the growing support for de-alerting and other measures aimed at risk reduction to make sure that they are implemented. It would make us all safer and would contribute to our common goal of achieving a world free of nuclear weapons.

Thank you.