Statement by Ambassador Antonio Guerreiro,
Permanent Representative of Brazil to the Conference on
Disarmament
on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition

Open-ended Working Group “taking forward multilateral nuclear
disarmament obligations”

Geneva, 14 May 2013

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honor of taking the floor on behalf of the six members of the
New Agenda Coalition (NAC): Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, South
Africa and my own country, Brazil.

We would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the
chancmanship of the Open Ended Working Group to take forward multilateral
nuclear disarmament negotiations.

The creation of this Working Group, together with the convening of a
High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament later this year, represents a
global call for action towards nuclear disarmament.

Since the General Assembly last year, it has become even clearer why
there is now greater sense of urgency to achieve and sustain a nuclear
weapons free world.

Over 120 countries were represented at the Conference on the
Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons hosted by the Government of
Norway in March. The message from that Conference was clear and stark:
humanity would be completely overwhelmed and powerless to respond to
the uniquely destructive power which a nuclear detonation – whether by
accident, miscalculation or design – would unleash, the effects of which
would not be constrained by national borders.
Last month, 80 countries aligned themselves with a statement delivered by NAC member South Africa on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and many other countries acknowledged the devastating humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons.

The humanitarian approach has also been supported by such organizations as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as well as many NGOs.

It is therefore clear to us and, we believe, the overwhelming majority of the world’s citizens, that there is a groundswell of support for progress on nuclear disarmament.

We must respond to that clear message from the international community and rise to the challenge. We must use the opportunity which this Group presents to explore ways to get us to the shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

It is regrettable that efforts so far undertaken by nuclear weapon States to reduce the number of their nuclear weapons have been limited to bilateral arms reduction agreements. While such reductions are undoubtedly important, they do not meet the requirements flowing from an unequivocal undertaking to disarm. Neither do they represent a commitment to the abolition of all nuclear weapons. The benefits of quantitative reductions are undermined by ongoing qualitative improvements in nuclear forces and by the strengthening of the roles ascribed for nuclear weapons in military doctrines.

The nuclear-weapon States are duty-bound to fulfill their obligations and enter negotiations, in good faith, towards a transparent, irreversible and verifiable process, with defined benchmarks and timelines, to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. The total elimination of nuclear weapons must be a clear and unconditional objective. The unsustainable divide between haves and have-nots must end. The narrow national security interests of a few cannot trump the collective security interests of all.

It is beyond our understanding that, more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons still threaten our world.
The argument that nuclear weapons are needed to guarantee a country’s national security is sometimes invoked to justify their continued retention. That argument does not make sense. As long as nuclear weapons are portrayed by some countries as the ultimate tool for their defense it will seem logical for other countries to develop them.

The threat to humanity is far too great to allow that narrative to go unchallenged. Nuclear weapons are not a guarantor of security; they are the most destructive and disproportionate weapons that humanity has ever created.

Non nuclear weapon States have already taken the high moral ground by rejecting nuclear weapons, but frustration is mounting at the lack of action by nuclear weapon States, in particular with respect to the non-fulfillment of their multilateral commitments.

Humanity cannot wait forever, the time for action is now. This Working Group provides an opportunity for us to examine how to end the threat posed by nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chairman,

We are fully aware that dismantling nuclear arsenals is a complex process and that a world free of nuclear weapons cannot be achieved overnight. However, we need a political horizon, with clear benchmarks and datelines to achieve this goal.

We expect that the Working Group may help us move towards concrete proposals to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. These proposals should be included in the report to the General Assembly and the Conference on Disarmament. We believe it is important that discussions are focused and concentrated on key issues.

We expect that the report, and the ideas and recommendations contained therein, may also contribute to breaking the long-standing impasse and allow the resumption of multilateral disarmament negotiations.

We would like to wish you success in your task and reiterate our full commitment to the Working Group.