Preparatory Committee
2015 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Cluster I:
De-alerting – Decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems

Vienna, 4 May 2012

H.E. Mr. Benno Laggner
Head of the Swiss Delegation

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria and Switzerland, on the issue of decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems. Since 2007, our countries have collectively called for action to address the significant numbers of nuclear weapons that remain today at high levels of readiness.

It remains of a deep and abiding concern to us that twenty years after the end of the Cold War, doctrinal aspects from that era – such as high alert levels – are perpetuated today. The maintenance on high alert of weapons, which have the destructive capacity of killing billions of people and which pose a threat to the survival of humanity, raises fundamental moral questions.

We find it anachronistic that while tensions that marked the international security climate during the Cold War have lowered significantly, corresponding decreases in the alert levels of the arsenals of the largest nuclear-weapon states have not been forthcoming.

We acknowledge and welcome that some modest progress has been made in the past. This highlights that de-alerting is possible and that technical and political challenges – which no doubt exist whenever changes in the nuclear postures are made – can be met. However, more can and more needs to be done to address the disproportionate high levels of alert of many nuclear weapons.

We understand that, in some countries, further work in this area is ongoing. For example, we note that efforts are underway to consider measures to increase crisis stability by prolonging decision-making and thus “lengthening the fuse” for the launch of any nuclear attack. Such measures would also contribute to lowering the risk of unintentional or accidental use.
Mindful of the obligations contained in article VI of the Treaty, we call on all nuclear-weapons
States to intensify efforts, be they unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, to lower levels of alert.

The 13 Practical Steps of 2000 highlighted de-alerting as a step leading to nuclear
disarmament and called for “concrete agreed measures to further reduce the operational
status of nuclear weapons systems”. Like other elements of these practical steps, de-alerting
still needs to be implemented fully by the nuclear-weapons States. It is therefore all the more
important that these steps were reaffirmed in the 2010 Review Conference Final Document.

Moreover, the 2010 outcome also included a commitment by the nuclear-weapons States to
“consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapons States in further reducing the
operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems” on which they are to report on in 2014.

Mr Chairman,

A lowered operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems would demonstrate a clear
commitment to a diminishing role for nuclear weapons and represent a confidence-building
measure, as well as an important interim step towards a nuclear-weapons-free world.

We look forward to receiving reports throughout the review cycle on how efforts to lower the
operational readiness of nuclear weapons are progressing. Such information will be
important for the NPT 2015 Review Conference to assess steps taken and identify further
action that may be required on this important facet of nuclear disarmament.

Thank you for your attention.