Mr. Chair,

I have the honour of taking the floor on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria and my own country Switzerland on the issue of De-alerting, or decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

Our countries remain deeply concerned that today almost 2,000 warheads remain deployed and ready for use within a matter of minutes. Such alert levels multiply the risks posed by nuclear weapons. They increase the probability of an inadvertent, erroneous, unauthorised or precipitate launch. They represent an unacceptable danger to humanity as even a small percentage of these warheads, if used, could kill millions of people.

The recent international focus on the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the threat that the destructive capacity of nuclear weapons poses to the survival of humanity has only served to highlight the urgent necessity to reduce alert levels.

Mr. Chair,

Lowering alert levels is an integral element of the nuclear disarmament process. The 13 Practical Steps of the 2000 Review Conference 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.” Moreover, the 2010 Review Conference reaffirmed the nuclear-weapon States’ commitment to accelerate concrete progress on the steps leading to nuclear disarmament contained in the Final Document of the 2000 Review Conference. In particular, they agreed to “consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon States in further reducing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems” and to report at this Preparatory Committee on the fulfilment of their undertakings in this area.

We are concerned that in the nearly 15 years since De-alerting has been highlighted as a practical step, reducing operational readiness has been largely ignored by the relevant nuclear-weapon States. We welcome the fact that the reports submitted by the nuclear-weapon States under the 2010 Action Plan have addressed the issue of De-alerting. However, we cannot but conclude from these reports that there has been no meaningful progress in reducing alert levels since 2010, and that high alert levels continue to play an important role in the doctrines of certain countries.
According to Action 5, the 2015 Review Conference will take stock and consider the next steps for the full implementation of article VI. In this context, the De-alerting Group has submitted a working paper to this Preparatory Committee (NPT/CONF.2015/PC.III/WP.24), which focuses on the implications of high alert levels, outlines our concerns at the lack of progress on lowering operational readiness, and makes recommendations with regard to the treatment of De-alerting at the 2015 Review Conference.

Moving resolutely forward in the implementation of article VI at the Review Conference is a necessity for the sustainability of the NPT. This will require agreeing on concrete and measurable action steps regarding De-alerting, as well as for other disarmament-related measures. As stressed in the working paper, the Review Conference should receive undertakings from the nuclear-weapon States, to be achieved during the next review cycle,

- to address de-alerting comprehensively within the context of their collective engagement concerning the implementation of article VI;
- to reduce alert levels (unilaterally, bilaterally or otherwise) in a concrete and measurable way and within a specified timeframe; and
- to report to the States Parties on measures taken regarding alert levels.

Mr. Chair,

Our group has since 2007 been focusing on what we feel is an entirely reasonable and practical demand. We welcome measures taken following the end of the Cold War that lowered the operational readiness of specific categories of nuclear weapons. This showed that De-alerting is possible and feasible. On that basis, we call on nuclear-weapon States to intensify efforts, be they unilateral, bilateral or multilateral, to lower levels of alert of all nuclear weapons.

Our resolve to see progress in this area and our consciousness of the risks to humanity posed by current nuclear alert postures has been reinforced by the better understanding of the humanitarian consequences of the detonation of any nuclear weapon. Concrete action to reduce nuclear alert levels is well overdue.

I thank you for your attention.