2010 NPT REVIE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE TREATY ON
THE NON-PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
3-28 MAY 2010

MAIN COMMITTEE I

STATEMENT BY DELL HIGGIE
AMBASSADOR FOR DISARMAMENT

ON BEHALF OF
CHILE, MALAYSIA, NIGERIA, SWITZERLAND AND NEW ZEALAND

11 MAY 2010

As delivered
Mr Chairman,

I take the floor on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria, Switzerland, and my own country, New Zealand, on the issue of lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

This issue, sometimes described as “de-alerting”, is not a new one in the NPT framework. Ten years ago it was given clear expression as part of a practical step agreed by all the nuclear-weapon States in the context of leading towards nuclear disarmament in a way that promoted international stability, and was based on the principle of undiminished security for all. Accepting that step, the nuclear-weapon States undertook to institute “Concrete agreed measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems”.

The cross-regional Group on behalf of whom I am speaking set out our rationale for taking up this issue clearly and concisely in our General Debate statement of 4 May. We will not repeat ourselves today.

Mr Chairman,

Our Group is pursuing the issue of operational readiness on three fronts.

First, we have made it the subject of a series of resolutions in the UN General Assembly.

Secondly, in the lead up to this Review Conference we have engaged at Foreign Minister level with the five nuclear-weapon States with a view to undertaking a constructive dialogue with them.

Thirdly, we have tabled a Working Paper, NPT/CONF.2010/WP.10, through which we are seeking to ensure that the final product of this Review Conference reflects “concrete agreed measures” by the nuclear-weapon States in reducing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons ten years after the 2000 Outcome and 20 years after the end of the Cold War.


Our hope is that States parties will recognise that reductions in alert levels will contribute to the process of nuclear disarmament through indicating a diminishing role for nuclear weapons. Reductions in alert levels would also serve as important transparency and confidence-building measures.

Next, we propose that States parties urge the nuclear-weapon States to take additional concrete measures to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, with a view to ensuring that all nuclear weapons are removed from high alert status.
Lastly, and more explicitly, we would like States parties to call on the nuclear-weapon States to report regularly on measures they have taken to lower the operational readiness of their nuclear weapons systems. Our hope is regular reporting will allow confidence to be built that reductions in operational readiness will translate into reductions in the role of nuclear weapons in security doctrines. This in turn will help instill a climate in which nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation prosper.

Our Group has made it clear in its contacts with nuclear-weapon States that it wishes to pursue its objectives in a constructive manner. We are mindful, for instance, that the level of operational readiness varies among the different nuclear-weapon States and that the steps to be taken by these countries may therefore not be the same. We are also mindful that imbalances in military arsenals may in some instances complicate the achievement of progress towards widespread de-alerting. But if nuclear-weapon States are serious in seeking a safer world and creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, they must and can find ways to overcome that issue.

Mr Chairman

In conclusion, we are keen to capitalise on changes in the global security environment since the end of the Cold War. The adversarial relationships of those bleak times are clearly behind us and the threat of a conflict among major powers has become remote. Against this backdrop, high-alert levels have lost their salience.

We therefore commend our Working Paper, and urge all delegations to join us in support of the inclusion of language along the lines contained in the paper within the final outcome document.