

NEW ZEALAND MISSION to the UNITED NATIONS



Te Māngai o Aotearoa

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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION**

FIRST COMMITTEE

GENERAL DEBATE

**STATEMENT BY THE DISARMAMENT AMBASSADOR OF NEW ZEALAND
H.E. MR TIM CAUGHLEY**

MONDAY 13 OCTOBER 2003

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr Chairman,

It is a pleasure to see you leading the work of the First Committee. We especially appreciate your diligent consultation in preparing for this year's session, and are confident that under your leadership this Committee can make a difference. The current state of the world demands no less.

We fully associate ourselves with the statement made by the Ambassador of Brazil on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition. The New Agenda's goal of a world free of nuclear weapons has been and continues to be a key objective of the New Zealand government. The verifiable and irreversible destruction of all nuclear weapons is more vital than ever in the current international security environment.

The Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons was predicated on the agreement that the non-nuclear weapon States gave up the option of ever possessing nuclear weapons while the five nuclear weapon States entered into obligations to undertake effective measures towards nuclear disarmament. That commitment has since been reinforced by the "unequivocal undertaking" to nuclear disarmament given by the nuclear weapon States at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Within the NPT, non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament carry equal weight. One does not trump the other. The international community's current and justifiable concern about proliferation matters must not divert our attention from the bigger picture of a world where the norms against proliferation and for nuclear disarmament make common cause.

In this regard, there has never before been a more urgent need for the five nuclear weapon states to deliver on their commitments under the NPT regime. The risk of non-state actors accessing nuclear weapons, the vast amounts of nuclear material world-wide which remain susceptible to theft and diversion, continuing nuclear instability in South Asia, North Korea's proclaimed nuclear weapons programme and the possibility that others may follow -- these are all factors that demonstrate that there is only one guarantee for a safe and peaceful world and that is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

The moral authority inherent in demanding that others must not develop nuclear weapons capabilities relies on meaningful measures towards permanent nuclear disarmament by those states that possess them.

The international debate within the UN Security Council on weapons of mass destruction highlighted the importance of full and effective verification. Verification by an objective and independent body is crucial to building mutual trust and confidence between States. We call not only on those States under scrutiny to fully co-operate with the IAEA but also for all other States to support its processes and to follow due process.

We call on North Korea to reverse its announced abandonment of the NPT. Development of nuclear weapons by the DPRK would destabilise the Korean Peninsula and be a threat to regional security. We welcome the initiative to hold multilateral talks to address this concern. We hope that the process of dialogue will continue and that agreement can be reached which will result in the DPRK's permanent abandonment of nuclear weapons and a renewal of energy and development assistance to North Korea, which could then follow. We particularly commend China for its constructive facilitating role in the process of dialogue.

We remain gravely concerned by the continued retention of the nuclear weapons option by those three states, India, Israel and Pakistan, that operate unsafeguarded nuclear facilities and have not acceded to the NPT. The international community must intensify its efforts to achieve universal adherence to the NPT, and its accompanying verification regime, without conditions and without delay.

Given the scale and advanced state of Iran's nuclear activities, it is important that the IAEA is able to verify Iran's peaceful intentions. We call upon Iran to heed the strong message from the international community in the IAEA Board's resolution passed without dissent in September and to cooperate fully and urgently with the Agency. Iran must demonstrate complete transparency in the interests of confidence building with the international community. It is vital that the Agency be allowed to complete its assessment in order to provide the independent assurances we need.

New Zealand remains concerned over the lack of effective international controls over biological weapons. Outbreaks resulting from the intentional or accidental release of biological agents and rapidly evolving technology in particular in the area of biotechnology, have brought renewed urgency to reinforce the BWC. States parties to the Biological Weapons Convention this year embarked on a new process. That process was not New Zealand's preferred option for addressing the threat from biological weapons. We recognise however that agreement of all States parties is the strength of multilateral forums and believe that the Meeting of Experts process can agree to meaningful outcomes in the form of common understandings.

In spite of the deeply troubling events that have taken place over the last twelve months, there have been some positive movements. The First Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention held in April and May of this year demonstrated that the Chemical Weapons Convention is beginning to get into its stride. The Review Conference reinforced New Zealand's conviction that the Chemical Weapons Convention makes a vital and essential contribution to international peace and security. It demonstrated that multilateral disarmament Conventions can - and must - evolve in order to confront new challenges. But equally, that maintaining the continuing effectiveness of the Convention requires much hard work. We must not think the job is done once a Convention enters into force. In the case of the Chemical Weapons Convention, we must take the opportunity offered to us by the Review Conference outcome to demonstrate that we are prepared to take the Convention forward, and to reinforce its crucial role in the collective security architecture.

In particular, we welcome the developments this year in the Conference on Disarmament, giving some hope that the Conference may be able to agree on a comprehensive programme of work. On the CD's programme of work, New Zealand regards a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty as only one component of the broader programme required to achieve the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons, but an important one nonetheless.

We also welcome the G8's Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction as a practical and valuable contribution to international security.

New Zealand was pleased with the outcomes of the International Conference on Safety of Transport of Radioactive Material held in Vienna in early July this year, which recommended establishing a dialogue between the shipping states and the relevant coastal states on communication between governments, and setting up a working group on liability. As the current chair of the 16-member Pacific Islands Forum, we are only too well aware of the impact that a shipping accident, even without release of radioactivity, would have on the fragile tourism and fishing industries of our region.

In the area of conventional weapons we continue to see real progress being made. Intergovernmental efforts have reaped the benefits of closer partnerships with civil society. The Ottawa Convention stands as an unprecedented success in the disarmament arena in recent times. This year we warmly welcomed the Kingdom of Thailand's hosting of the Fifth Meeting of States Parties and bringing attention to the challenges that anti-personnel mines have posed for the Asian region. The partnership between States parties, IGOs and NGOs has contributed to the now firmly established international norm against the use of anti-personnel mines. We look forward to working with partners in the lead-up to next year's Review Conference not only to take stock of what has been achieved but also to strengthen the Convention's norms and objectives.

States parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons will arrive at a critical juncture in November when we will see whether a legally binding instrument on addressing the humanitarian impact of explosive remnants of war and a mandate for anti-vehicle mines can be achieved. At that meeting the credibility of the CCW forum will be on the line as the dreadful death and injury toll wreaked by ERW and AVMS is well known and can be clearly seen in countries such as Angola, Afghanistan and Cambodia. The humanitarian issues at stake demand a legally binding instrument on explosive remnants of war, one that establishes a strong international norm on the clearance of ERW and sets out measures to protect civilians.

This year at the First Biennial Meeting on the Programme of Action on Small Arms, States parties expressed a strong commitment to addressing the many and complex problems surrounding small arms. While there remains much to be done before the next meeting in 2005, we are confident that further progress will be made.

Whatever may be the differences between us, as we look back on the disturbing events since this Committee last met, we must surely all agree that there is an urgent need to move forward constructively. Even more important is that we move forward with a strengthened United Nations and with the tools to confront the threats we face today. In this context, New Zealand strongly supports the efforts to reform and revitalise the United Nations and in particular the First Committee, to make it effective and ensure that it can respond to the security concerns of its Member States.

Despite the current challenges working against progress towards peace and disarmament, we need to remember that individuals still have power to bring about change in their immediate environment. The UN Disarmament Study published last year provided a timely reminder of the vital importance of peace education. New Zealand fully supports the findings of the expert panel. One of our best hopes for a peaceful future is to encourage young people to develop non-confrontational ways of dealing with conflict, starting in their immediate surroundings and extending out to the wider community. By incorporating peace education programmes into all levels of society, we can reflect our joint goal of working towards a more secure and stable future. States parties, international organisations and civil society must work together to make this aspiration a reality.