



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

**Représentation permanente de la Suisse
auprès de la Conférence du Désarmement**

**Permanent Representation of Switzerland
to the Conference on Disarmament**

Check against delivery

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

Statement by

Ambassador Jürg Streuli

Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the Conference on Disarmament

on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Sweden and Switzerland

Agenda Item 1: Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and Nuclear Disarmament

Geneva, 31 July 2008

Mr Coordinator,

During our first round of informal consultations on the 19th of February, Chile, New Zealand, Nigeria, Sweden and Switzerland addressed this conference under the agenda item 'Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament' and spoke about De-Alerting - one of the sub-issues proposed by you for discussion under agenda item 1. Today, I am addressing you in the name these 5 countries and Malaysia, who has joined our efforts and expands our group regionally.

As you know, at the last General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, we have introduced resolution 62/36 called 'Decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems'.

This so-called De-Alerting resolution, which was inspired by the recommendations of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission of 2006, welcomed steps already taken to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems. It also called for further practical steps to address the significant portion of nuclear warheads that continue to remain on high alert.

While exact figures are unknown, experts estimate that about one third of the deployed nuclear weapons – hundreds of missiles armed with thousands of nuclear warheads – are at an alert level which allows them to be launched within a very short amount of time. The 'launch on warning procedures' mean that if early warning systems detect something that looks like an incoming nuclear strike, decision-makers have very little time to determine whether to launch a retaliatory attack.

In our view, today's post-cold war environment in no way justifies this high level of alert, and we find it increasingly difficult to accept the risks inherently associated with such alertness.

At this point, let me recall three reasons in favour of further steps to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapons:

- There are several instances where misunderstandings almost led to nuclear war. The lowering of the operational status of nuclear weapons undoubtedly reduces the risk of unintended launches caused by technical malfunction, accident, or acts of terrorism. De-alerting will minimise the probability of an accidental nuclear war caused by a falsely perceived attack.
- Furthermore, de-alerting would be a much needed confidence-building measure. Not only between the Nuclear Weapon States which continue to maintain nuclear alert levels of the cold war period. But also between NWS and non-NWS. In this sense de-alerting would be a highly welcome step in the lead-up to the 2010 NPT Review Conference. Let us also not forget that de-alerting was one of the 13 practical steps agreed upon at the NPT Review Conference in 2000.
- Thirdly, from a practical perspective, De-Alerting is a measure which can be approached on different technical levels. As some nuclear weapons states demonstrated mainly in the 1990s, it can be carried out within relatively short timeframes and it involves reasonable costs compared to keeping these systems on high alert. Further steps in this direction therefore would have immediate positive effects, no matter whether they are based on bilateral agreements or, more ambitiously, on a multilateral effort.

Mr. Coordinator,

We believe that, almost two decades after the end of the cold war, more action in this direction would be timely and reasonable. Achieving further progress would be an important measure in preventing accidental nuclear war, and a step that moves us further along the path of reducing nuclear dangers.

At the vote in the General Assembly in 2007, 139 Member States voted in favour of the resolution, 36 abstained, and 3 countries voted against. This is a positive result that our group wants to build on. We plan to table the resolution again this year and hope for your support.

We are looking forward to this year's discussions and are confident that, like last year, this resolution will spark a great deal of interest, not only among the delegations in New York and in capitals, but also among the wider public. We are particularly

pleased that former and present high-level politicians around the world have taken up this issue and have called for measures to take ballistic missiles off high alert.

Our six countries are looking forward to continuing and deepening our constructive dialogue on this issue in order to build the widest possible support for our pragmatic approach.

Thank you Mr Coordinator