STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR NAZHAAT.S.KHAN ON OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

Good morning Your Excellency,

On behalf of the Republic of Fiji, I commend you on the work of the Open Ended Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament and on the important steps planned to eradicate the risks of nuclear devastation on humanity. We must not allow stalemates to overwhelm us, we must push forward to rid the world of these unethical weapons that threaten us all.

Fiji speaks to you all with first-hand experience of the destruction and the long lasting effects that nuclear weapons have had on its people and on its ecosystem. We are still living with the repercussions today. As our Pacific Neighbour Palau stated in an earlier meeting, the Pacific region has faced the environmental and human consequences of more than 300 forced nuclear tests conducted over half a century. This regrettable history puts the Pacific in a position to voice our grievances and to support all measures that look to accomplish global zero. For the people of the Pacific nothing less than a complete prohibition on nuclear weapons, and on the trade of nuclear weapons, and concrete steps to provide effective redress for those who suffer the effects of nuclear testing and use, is acceptable. For the Pacific, this is both a moral and a legal issue. It must be a matter of conscience for those States who argue for the retention of nuclear weapons.

The Zero Draft that the working group has so efficiently presented us with contains four particular objectives that Fiji endorses. Firstly, Section B detailed concrete effective legal measures within which provision 27(f) proposes recognition of the rights of victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons and a commitment to provide assistance to victims and to environmental remediation. Pacific Islanders have suffered such contamination, and Fiji proposes further discourse on this crucial point of contention. Tribunals, such as the Nuclear Claims tribunal, have in the past been established but have failed to sufficiently compensate or provide redress for Pacific Islanders for the destruction they experienced. A cause for great concern is the silence of the offending states. They take no responsibility for the past, they do not agree to legal steps enforcing change or providing redress in the present, and make no commitments for the future. For Pacific Islanders who have lost much as a result of nuclear testing in the Pacific, such attitudes show a gross disregard for humanity.

Secondly, the issue of visitation, transit, overflight, stationing and deployment specified in element six of Annex 1 requires particular focus. The Pacific Ocean’s geographical position and its composition makes the region particularly susceptible to these abuses. The Pacific region is not a nuclear weapons trial zone, it is not a laboratory for nuclear development and proliferation, and it surely must not be a launching pad for nuclear attacks, as the Micronesian island of Tinian was once used as, for the plane Enola Gay en route to Hiroshima in 1945.
Another recommendation that Fiji supports is Section B (33) (f): the strengthening of nuclear weapon free zones and the creation of these Zones. The Pacific’s own nuclear free zone established within the Rarotonga Treaty, signed by Australia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa in 1985, not only represents the Pacific’s strong commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons but is also evidence of the effectiveness of such a measure.

Fiji also supports section (C) (43), whereby transparency measures are marked as paramount in achieving the Working Group’s objective. Specifically, the establishment of a reporting mechanism that works within the framework of the United Nations is a positive step to enhance accountability, promote transparency and in turn, facilitate nuclear disarmament.

Lastly, a legally binding treaty banning nuclear weapons is the ideal instrument that would fill the legal gap that nuclear disarmament negotiations have grappled with. We, and I speak for Fiji, Nauru, Palau, Samoa and Tuvalu, have submitted a Working Paper to the OEWG, for such a Treaty and its necessary elements. I propose we earnestly follow the direction towards a legally binding treaty banning nuclear weapons, for it is after all, our main objective.

Your Excellency, Fiji looks forward to participating in this meeting of the Open Ended Working Group for Nuclear Disarmament.

Thank you.

(Friday, 5th August 2016, 10am, Conference room XIX Palais des Nations, Geneva)