

Statement by H.E. Jerry Matjila
On behalf of the New Agenda Coalition at the
First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly 73rd Session
General Debate

8 October 2018

[Please check against delivery]

Thank you Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition (NAC) members: Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and my own country South Africa. At the outset, the NAC would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of this year's First Committee and would like to assure you of the NAC's full cooperation and support with the view to the successful conclusion of our deliberations during the next four weeks.

As we have done in the past, the NAC will present a draft resolution to this Committee which will be introduced during the thematic debate on nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

This year marks the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, who in an impassioned speech to the United Nations General Assembly on 21 September 1998, called on the nuclear-weapon states to make a firm commitment to the speedy, final and total elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons capabilities, and announced that the NAC would be submitting a resolution to the First Committee for consideration by the General Assembly. The resolution was entitled "Towards a Nuclear Weapons Free World: The Need for a New Agenda", and intended to contribute to the elimination of these weapons.

This year also marks 20 years since the founding of the NAC in 1998, when NAC countries considered the continued threat to humanity represented by the prospect of the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by the nuclear weapon states, as well as by those nuclear-weapons-possessing states that were not parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the attendant possibility of use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Throughout the past 20 years, the NAC has advocated for the implementation of concrete, transparent, mutually reinforcing, verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmament measures and the fulfilment of obligations and commitments within the framework of the NPT. Although some progress has been achieved over this period it is far from sufficient, and we are deeply concerned that new challenges in international security continue to be cited as justifications for slow progress. For the NAC, the global security environment is not an excuse for inaction – rather it reinforces the need for urgency. What is lacking is not favourable conditions, but political will and determination.

Last year saw the successful conclusion of the United Nations conference to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. The adoption on 7 July 2017 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons expressed the desire of the overwhelming majority in the General Assembly for urgent action. This urgency grew from our increased knowledge of the growing risks and catastrophic humanitarian consequences, including their strong gendered impact, of a nuclear weapon detonation. Considering that any use of nuclear weapons would be contrary to the principles and rules of international humanitarian law and the fact that their consequences cannot be constrained within borders, the continued reliance upon them in security doctrines and concepts is indefensible and fosters proliferation.

Chairperson,

Nuclear disarmament is not only an international legal obligation, but also a moral and ethical imperative. In spite of the growing international consensus regarding the illegitimacy of nuclear weapons, an estimated 15,000 nuclear devices regrettably still exist. These weapons continue to remain at the heart of the security doctrines of nuclear-weapon States and those party to alliances with nuclear-weapon States. Far from strengthening international peace and security, this state of affairs serves to weaken it, aggravating international tensions and conflict, and jeopardizing the collective well-being of all States and peoples, as well as the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chairperson,

Given that almost five decades have passed since the entry into force of the NPT, the status quo on nuclear disarmament is unacceptable. The NAC believes it is time for States to finally deliver upon their commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons in line with the NPT obligations and to safeguard future generations from the danger posed by nuclear weapons. This is the only way to maintain the integrity and sustainability of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

The NAC shares a firm commitment to this instrument, which is the cornerstone of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. It is fundamental to bear in mind that

the NPT was adopted and indefinitely extended on the basis of a 'grand bargain'; nuclear-weapon States legally committed themselves to pursuing and achieving nuclear disarmament, in return for which non-nuclear weapon States legally committed themselves not to develop nuclear weapons. The presumption of indefinite possession of nuclear weapons runs counter to the object and purpose of the NPT and threatens to erode its credibility and effectiveness.

The Action Plan agreed at the 2010 NPT Review Conference provided an important opportunity to put the process towards a nuclear-weapon-free world back on track. The nuclear-weapon States reaffirmed the 2000 unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament, and committed to accelerating progress in this regard. The 2010 Action Plan reaffirmed the decisions taken in 1995 and 2000, including the 13 practical steps, to advance the implementation of Article VI of the NPT.

The NAC affirms the significant contribution of nuclear-weapon free zones to nuclear disarmament efforts and achieving the goal of a nuclear weapon-free world, and reiterates in this regard the importance of the early implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East.

The New Agenda Coalition again calls for and expects the implementation by the nuclear-weapon States of their nuclear disarmament commitments, both qualitative and quantitative, in a manner that enables States parties to regularly monitor progress, including through their use of a standard detailed reporting format. This will enhance confidence and trust not only among nuclear-weapon States but also between nuclear-weapon States and the non-nuclear-weapon States.

The implementation of the NPT's Article VI is a legal obligation binding on all States Parties. It was on this basis that the NAC welcomed the adoption on 7 July 2017 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is an effective legal measure, contributing to the implementation of Article VI. Additional measures, however, are still needed in order to fully implement Article VI of the NPT. We must uphold and preserve the NPT, and the best way to protect the NPT is to implement it.

The current review cycle of the NPT presents an opportunity for the States Parties to undertake comprehensive review and assessment of the current status of the Treaty, the implementation of previous obligations and commitments within its framework, and the challenges facing its full implementation.

It is now time that the international community translate words into concrete action backed by clear and agreed upon benchmarks and timelines. Bearing in mind the special responsibility that lies with the nuclear-weapon States, the NAC believes that these

States should not only implement their existing commitments, but should also strive to build further on them in order to accelerate fulfilment of their obligations under the NPT.

Chairperson,

As a cross-regional grouping, the NAC works actively for concrete progress on nuclear disarmament. Achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons remains the NAC's primary goal.

The NAC urges all States to seize the opportunity of this First Committee to make a difference on nuclear disarmament.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.

NZ disarmament statements online, www.converge.org.nz/pma/nzdist.htm