



## 2021 UN General Assembly

### General Statement

**Delivered by Lucy Duncan  
Disarmament Ambassador**

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*Tēnā koutou katoa* – warm greetings to you all.

New Zealand warmly welcomes you, Ambassador Hilale, as Chair, and assures you of our full support.

It seems that each year, as we prepare for First Committee, our statements and briefings remark on the deterioration of the global security environment and the difficulties faced by those seeking forward movement on key disarmament challenges. And this is certainly the case in 2021, notwithstanding the welcome good news on the extension of New START and the entry into force of the TPNW. We continue to see inertia or backwards steps in respect of implementation by the nuclear weapon states of their nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments. Major nuclear non-proliferation challenges remain unresolved. States continue to use unlawful weapons or weapons unlawfully, and evade efforts to hold them to account. And, just when we need it the most, the UN disarmament machinery remains deadlocked.

A dispiriting picture, but not one we are powerless to change. Earlier this year, Aotearoa New Zealand developed a disarmament strategy to guide our national work in this area and to make clear our view that progress on disarmament does not *depend* on the existence of a positive global environment but can *contribute* to its creation. Our strategy identifies three pillars of engagement on which New Zealand is focusing effort this year and next.

The first pillar, on **nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation**, reflects the continued urgency of eliminating nuclear weapons. This is New Zealand's top disarmament priority. We have clear expectations for the upcoming NPT Review Conference, underlying which is my country's fundamental commitment to seeing the "grand bargain" between the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation provisions of the Treaty fully implemented. The world will be watching the RevCon for evidence of the continued commitment of the Nuclear-Weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals and to demonstrate practical steps towards this end.

The entry into force of the TPNW in January recently injected some momentum into nuclear disarmament efforts and demonstrated some much-needed progress under Article VI of the NPT. New Zealand is proud to be a TPNW State Party – one of ten from the Pacific, a region free of nuclear

weapons, but with nuclear legacy issues to be overcome. We look forward to the First Meeting of States Parties.

Our disarmament strategy's second pillar reflects the value we place on upholding and, where necessary, **strengthening IHL**. Humanitarian considerations are at the heart of New Zealand's approach to disarmament and to the fundamental requirement to protect civilians. We are deeply concerned about the ongoing use of prohibited arms, such as chemical weapons, and other weapons used inconsistently with IHL.

A key priority is supporting increased uptake and implementation of key disarmament treaties including the Arms Trade Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions in the Pacific and beyond. In addition, we strongly support the negotiation of a political declaration on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, to make a meaningful difference to the lives of civilians caught in conflict.

The third pillar of New Zealand's disarmament strategy focuses on **shaping the future** in two priority areas. The first is to develop a robust national policy on space security issues, and engage in multilateral processes aimed at achieving international agreement on responsible behaviours in space as well as other normative and legislative frameworks to ensure the safe, secure, sustainable and peaceful use of space.

Our second priority is progressing our national policy on **autonomous weapons systems**, and engaging actively in the elaboration of an international framework to effectively prohibit and regulate these weapons. Such a framework is clearly needed in view of increasing awareness of their legal, political and ethical implications. It is imperative that weapon systems with autonomous features comply with IHL and are ethically acceptable. Yet, for the moment, the development of these technologies is rapidly outpacing global policy and regulation. New Zealand is participating in the Group of Governmental Experts, where we want to see meaningful progress this year.

Underlined throughout New Zealand's disarmament strategy is the value we place on our close disarmament cooperation with international partners and organisations, and with civil society at home and abroad. It is only through *mahi tahi* (working together) and *kotahitanga* (shared aspiration) that we can achieve our goals in this Committee – to achieve a safer and more secure world, free from weapons of mass destruction, where international law is respected and civilians in conflict zones are protected from harm.

Thank you, Chair.