



**UNGA72: FIRST COMMITTEE**

**General debate statement by New Zealand**

**Delivered by H.E Dell Higgle  
Ambassador for Disarmament**

**6 October 2017**

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Mr Chair,

The New Zealand Delegation extends its best wishes to you, Ambassador Baher Al-Uloom, as you guide this year's First Committee in its annual appraisal of multilateral developments in the disarmament and international security context.

Sadly, we have become accustomed over recent years here in this Committee to having little positive to review as regards the work of the Conference on Disarmament. It is indeed some decades now since the Conference has been able to live up to its mandate and move forward with the negotiation of any international treaty. In contrast, in earlier decades, the CD (or its precursor body) was at the centre of the adoption of a broad range of international 'legislation' falling under the purview of the First Committee. These treaties successfully framed the aspirations of the international community and set rules for International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

I note that the United Nations is now the depositary for over 560 multilateral treaties (treaties spanning not just the work of our Committee, of course, but that of all the UNGA Committees). I learned this fact, Mr Chair, from the recent invitation sent to Member States to attend what the UN calls its

“Treaty Event” - something held annually here at UN HQ and which, this year, took place over several days late last month.

“I strongly urge all States to join multilateral treaties concluded under the auspices of the United Nations as part of a global campaign to *affirm the norms that safeguard humanity*,” Secretary-General Guterres said in his invitation to us all.

One of the treaties understandably highlighted - indeed, opened for signature - at this year’s Event was the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The Secretary-General has put his finger perfectly on the impetus which led to the adoption of this new Treaty. The desire to make *some* contribution to safeguarding humanity - in recognition of the dire humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and to affirm the value and standards of International Humanitarian Law - was exactly the motivating force for the large grouping of UN Members who came together earlier this year to negotiate the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. It was also the impetus behind New Zealand’s signature of the Treaty at the ceremony here on 20 September.

New Zealand, and New Zealanders, are under no false illusion about what it is that this Treaty can do. In establishing the legal framing for a world-free of nuclear weapons, we do not expect the Treaty to result in significant change to the normative situation against nuclear weapons *in the short term* - any more, for instance, than the prohibition which the 1925 Geneva Protocol put in place on chemical and biological weapons did, at its outset, for *those* weapon systems.

Clearly there are further - and very important - steps that must yet be taken on the pathway to the elimination of nuclear weapons and in order to give full expression to Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). But the signatories of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons have taken a *first* step - a step, we believe, which advances our security and is in the interests of humanity.

Significant standards have been set in other recent Treaties of which the UN is the guardian. New Zealand remains an active supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty and last month took part in the third of its Conference of States Parties. With the governance arrangements and institutional processes for the Treaty now largely finalised, it will be important that States Parties direct increased attention to implementation - to ensuring that arms transfers meet the prohibitions and guidelines established in the Treaty - so that all our communities can share the benefit of its humanitarian and security dividend.

Last month was also the occasion of the annual gathering of States Parties to the Oslo Cluster Munitions Convention. Recent instances of the use of this deplorably indiscriminate weapon - notably in Syria - have not been able to impede the growing normative influence of the Oslo Convention's ban of cluster munitions nor undermine its contribution to the body of IHL.

We look forward to the forthcoming Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Landmines Convention later this year. There can be few treaties which provide a clearer illustration of the compelling power, over time, of a norm laid down - initially

in the face of formidable opposition - in order to protect our civilian populations.

One treaty even more widely ratified than the Ottawa Convention is the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Few members of the global community would dispute its success in shaping a powerful norm against the testing of nuclear weapons notwithstanding its lack of entry-into-force: the only country flouting this norm is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). New Zealand condemns its testing of nuclear weapons in the strongest possible terms.

New Zealand remains grateful for the UN's role in safeguarding these and the rest of the over 560 treaties of which it is the guardian. As a strong advocate of multilateralism and the rule of law, we will continue to support efforts by the international community to adopt and to implement new "norms to safeguard humanity".

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NZ disarmament statements online, [www.converge.org.nz/pma/nzdist.htm](http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/nzdist.htm)