



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

**UN Conference to Negotiate a
Nuclear Prohibition Treaty**

General Debate

28 March 2017

Madam President,

The New Zealand Delegation wishes to congratulate you on your election as President of this very important Conference. There could be no State with a better record than Costa Rica in pushing for global solutions to global problems - and on disarmament issues, in particular. We will be delighted to assist you in your endeavours as one of your Vice-Presidents if our nomination from the WEOG is accepted.

Madam President, there can be no doubt that nuclear disarmament has been one of the longest-held objectives of the international community. It is enshrined in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and in UNGA resolutions dating back to 1946. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has confirmed that "there exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects ..."

In the twenty-one years since the Court gave its (unanimous) Opinion on this point, there have indeed been no multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations. This fact serves to

underline the significance of the process we are launching here this week.

Our process this week is intended – to use the words of former Secretary-General Ban in marking a recent International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons – “to meet the genuine security interest of all humanity”.

In moving forward now to establish the legal framing for a world free of nuclear weapons, we accept that, *in the short-term* at least, there will be limits to the reach and normative influence of our treaty – this was the case too, for example, with regard to the prohibition which the 1925 Geneva Protocol put in place on chemical and biological weapons.

But like the framers of that Protocol, we, too, are focused on the humanitarian impact of the weapon we wish to proscribe, and making our view of the application of International Humanitarian Law clear. And like the drafters of the Protocol, we do not think our citizens – be they civilians or soldiers – should face the risks these weapons entail.

In moving forward now on the first steps toward the adoption of a universal treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons, we will be giving legal expression to the promise of Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). And we are doing what is in our power in order to replenish and strengthen its basis for non-proliferation.

As was the case for the Geneva Protocol, our process is also a *starting point*. That is made clear in the governing mandate set for us in UNGA Resolution 71/258 which refers to our

embarkation on a process of “prohibition, leading to the elimination” of nuclear weapons.

New Zealand brings to this negotiation our long and proud history as a strong supporter of nuclear disarmament, as a member of our regional Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga), and on the basis of our guiding domestic legislation – the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act, 1987.

We look forward to playing an active and constructive part in this negotiation alongside all colleagues here – including our valued civil society partners who have made such a strong contribution to our work to date.

Thank you Madam President.