



UNGA71: FIRST COMMITTEE

General debate statement by New Zealand

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

6 October 2016

The New Zealand Delegation extends its best wishes to you, Ambassador Boukadoum, as you guide this year's First Committee in our annual stocktake of developments in the disarmament and arms control context and as we set our compass for the year ahead.

You will know from your Delegation in Geneva, Mr Chair, that discussions have taken place there this year which have breathed new life into the nuclear disarmament agenda. We wish to place on record our gratitude to Ambassador Thongphakdi of Thailand for his able leadership and hard work in chairing the Open-Ended Working Group Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations (OEWG). Those fortunate enough to participate in its meetings are able to attest to just how dynamic and innovative a body it was.

It was also a very *inclusive* one: inclusive in its invitation to each and every UNGA member to join its proceedings. Inclusive, also, in the sense that it brought together, or forged, what I will call a 'new mainstream'. What had begun at the outset of the OEWG as a set of discrete regional voices - the voice of Africa, of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, of ASEAN, or of other groupings such as that from my own Pacific neighbourhood - each with shades of

difference in their vision for the actual pathway ahead, had converged by the time of the final OEWG session into a unified voice with a single vision. This shared vision is set out in the recommendation put forward in Paragraph 67 of the OEWG's Report (A/71/371): a recommendation for the convening of a UN conference in 2017 to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading to their total elimination.

We should not, however, think of this as a novel or revolutionary vision. After all, it is simply a roadmap for something envisioned much earlier – and promised us all in the Nuclear Weapon Non-Proliferation Treaty. Any suggestion that the OEWG vision fails to take account of the views and security interests of other states overlooks the promise of Article VI and the near universal membership of the NPT - and would seem to overlook, too, the unequivocal commitment already given (in 2000 and 2010) by the Five Nuclear Weapon States to renounce their nuclear weapons. As the International Court of Justice's 1996 Advisory Opinion on Nuclear Weapons served to make clear, it is not a question of '*whether*'. It has only been a question of '*when*'.

There are some who are saying that *now* is not the time. Such a view overlooks the point outlined in a preambular paragraph in the new draft resolution following up on the OEWG that, in fact, the current international climate makes multilateralism and the increased attention to disarmament and non-proliferation issues *all the more urgent*. In times of international turbulence there is more than usual benefit to building and sustaining rules-based systems and architecture.

Accordingly, my Delegation welcomes the opportunity to move forward on the architecture essential for nuclear disarmament.

In doing so, we will be building on the established framing of the NPT; providing a firm basis for the implementation of *all* its provisions; and advancing the core values (including respect for International Humanitarian Law and its fundamental objective of protecting civilians from military action) which lie at the heart of our United Nations. The fact that IHL is being routinely flouted in the horrific conditions prevailing in Syria – and indeed in a number of contexts elsewhere – is, we believe, no reason, Mr Chair, to allow one failure to compound another. The international community must not fail in moving forward on the promise of the NPT by matching the prohibitions on both *other* types of Weapons of Mass Destruction, chemical and biological, with one now on *nuclear* weapons.

In the interests of keeping well within your time limit, Mr Chair, I propose to leave New Zealand's review of developments in most other areas of the First Committee's purview to our statements to be delivered during the forthcoming thematic debates. The one topic I would wish to comment on now, however, is the Arms Trade Treaty.

I would particularly like to thank Nigeria for their careful stewardship of the ATT over the past year - it has indeed been an honour for New Zealand to serve as one of their Vice-Presidents over this period – and to congratulate Finland on now assuming the Presidency. We know that the key issues facing the Treaty at this point - its universalisation and implementation - are safe in Finnish hands. We look forward to playing our part, including as a member of the Selection Committee reviewing projects for funding from the ATT Voluntary Trust Fund. We hope that the Trust Fund will meet the needs of those countries requiring assistance to join and implement the Treaty and New Zealand is pleased to have

contributed almost NZ\$100,000 to it for projects in the Pacific and in Africa.

We believe the ATT to be an outstanding example in recent times of the international community meeting its responsibility to move forward and put in place rules-based systems intended to improve the security and well-being of all our citizens. But, at present, it is still very early in the life of this Treaty: after all it was adopted by the UNGA only a little over three years ago. As such, we recognise that it has been necessary in this initial period to focus above all on setting up the ATT's governance structures and processes.

With these in place, and the Secretariat now properly established, our ATT community can turn its full attention to ensuring our Treaty is able to deliver on its humanitarian and security promise.

Thank you, Mr Chair.