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New Zealand Permanent Mission
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Cluster 1 (Nuclear Weapons) Statement

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New Zealand aligns itself with the statement delivered last week by Egypt, on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition, which introduced this year's NAC resolution. Our resolution builds on those of previous years, emphasising the need for progress on fulfilling the Action Plan of the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, and calling for further steps to be taken on nuclear disarmament.

Of course, the word "steps" has in recent times become a rather loaded one. Sometimes it can, indeed, seem that some of us are content to debate the nature of "steps" rather than to discuss the path on which those steps are to take us. And I was rather surprised to hear it stated in the General Debate in the first week of the Committee that the 2010 NPT Action Plan represents a common approach that commits all States Parties to the "step-by-step" approach.

In fact, it is indeed true that there are references to "steps" in the Action Plan - for instance to the 13 practical steps of 2000. Equally, Action 5 also refers to "steps". But rather more importantly, it makes the destination of those steps very clear: they lead to nuclear disarmament - and it is on this pathway that nuclear-weapon states have committed to "accelerate concrete progress".

Fortunately the discussion on nuclear disarmament in the new venues available to us this year did not allow itself to get unduly distracted about issues of process - steps, step-by-step, concrete steps, building blocks etc. Instead they explored new ways to deliver on our collective nuclear disarmament responsibilities.

It is clear to us that the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) which took place this year in Geneva met a need to respond both to the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and to the inability of the long-standing disarmament machinery to deliver that progress. It gave us a venue for some very interesting and interactive debates on a wide range of nuclear disarmament issues. These are reflected in its report and offer us important pointers for the way ahead. New Zealand is pleased to co-sponsor the resolution being presented to this Assembly which follows up on the OEWG's work.

Similarly, the important Conference hosted by the Government of Norway in March this year provided the opportunity for serious consideration of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and heralded an important and necessary shift in the way the international community approaches nuclear weapon issues.

We believe it is not enough to say that this approach does not need to be considered by all of us here in view of the fact that we are able to rely on the nuclear weapon possessor states to know about, and understand (on our behalf as it were), the humanitarian consequences of any use by them of these weapons. Such an attitude would run counter to our undertakings in the NPT and our collective responsibility to work to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The growing support for the humanitarian initiative reflects a more general impetus to focus on human, rather than state-centric, security. Some, indeed, suggest that this is one of the tectonic shifts between twentieth and twenty-first century thinking - and that in this century it will always be our citizens, and not our State apparatus, that must be put first. Increasingly, then, I think we can expect discussions on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons to be at the core of all future consideration of nuclear disarmament. We welcome, in this regard, the Declaration of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States issued in August this year calling for an emphasis on this issue during any discussion of nuclear disarmament. We also draw the attention of colleagues here to the Humanitarian Initiative Statement which will be delivered in this Committee by New Zealand on behalf of a large grouping of countries at the end of this debate.

New Zealand firmly believes that the humanitarian approach puts the priority where it should and must be: it takes nothing away from existing processes, and establishes no structures of its own. It reminds us all that it is the destination – the end result – of where we are going that matters, and it lends urgency to our reaching that destination. We see no contradiction between our support for this approach and our commitment to the NPT – indeed it seems to suggest a very reliable pathway to fulfilment of the NPT. We look forward to the intensification of discussion on this topic next February in Mexico.

Next year will also be an important year for the NPT and our measurement of progress on the 2010 Action Plan. We look to all States, but particularly the nuclear-weapon States, to fully implement the Action Plan and look forward to the reporting on nuclear disarmament which is to be provided next year by the nuclear-weapon States.

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty remains a key priority for my delegation; it would certainly signal progress towards a nuclear weapon-free world. New Zealand is pleased again this year to present, with our core co-sponsors Australia and Mexico, a resolution on the CTBT and the importance of its entry into force. We look forward to seeing this resolution once again receive the same very broad support that it has in the past. We continue to call on all States that have not yet done so, and particularly the remaining Annex 2 States, to ratify the CTBT without any further delay.

New Zealand is pleased to associate ourselves with the statement already delivered by Nigeria on behalf of the De-alerting Group in relation to the reduction of the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems – a very practical and, we believe, long overdue step and which is included in the NPT Action Plan.

We were pleased, too, to have sponsored a side-event here last Friday, together with Switzerland, which featured three eminent Professors of International Law. This followed up on a discussion which New Zealand organised at the OEWG in May and which also explored the application of international law (including international humanitarian law - IHL) to the use of nuclear weapons - in an effort to help dispel some of the myths which have come, for instance, to surround the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion of 1996. I note that it often gets overlooked that the Court did not in fact take the view that it would be lawful to use nuclear weapons even in a most extreme situation of self-defence. But the Court did say that any use of nuclear weapons must be compatible with IHL.

It remains useful, we believe, to continue to bear in mind the existing framing of IL and IHL as we look to make better progress towards nuclear disarmament and the realisation of the promise of the NPT. We hope that 2014 will deliver on the opportunity to move further along the pathway to nuclear disarmament.