

UNGA 69 First Committee 2014

On the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons (2nd revised draft, 20 Oct)

Joint statement presented on behalf of Australia

The renewed global focus on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons has re-energised concerns about the horrific consequences for humanity that would result from accidental or deliberate use of nuclear weapons, or a terrorist attack involving fissile material. It is our concern about the continuing nuclear risks to humanity, and a desire for a peaceful future for successive generations, which underpins our long-standing advocacy for eventual progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, when conditions allow, particularly through the NPT.

We stress the significance of spreading awareness of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons across borders and generations. In order to foster further momentum for achieving a world free of nuclear weapons, we need - especially in our own States - to fully comprehend why we must resolutely strive for a world without nuclear weapons, and must take concrete steps ourselves. It is in this context that we welcome the statement delivered by New Zealand on behalf of a large number of countries on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. It is in the interests of the very survival of humanity that nuclear war must never occur, but as we believe that nuclear weapons still play an important role in preventing such a war, we are facing some difficult choices in pursuing disarmament. Some may interpret this as a conflict of interest, but it is not.

We acknowledge that there have been significant reductions in the number of nuclear weapons worldwide since the end of the Cold War. However, more than 16,000 nuclear warheads still exist, many on high alert status. It is also regrettable that some states possessing nuclear weapons continue to produce new nuclear weapons.

It is therefore crucial that all States, including ours, more resolutely and urgently fulfil their disarmament commitments and work to ensure these weapons are not used and do not proliferate. While eliminating nuclear weapons is only possible through substantive and constructive engagement with those states which possess nuclear weapons, we are determined to take our own concrete measures to support disarmament by reducing the role of nuclear weapons in our own security policies and doctrines, in accordance with our NPT commitments.

To create the conditions that would facilitate further major reductions in nuclear arsenals and eventually eliminate them requires the global community to cooperate regardless of the relative weight given to the security and humanitarian dimensions of nuclear weapons. Disarmament must proceed regardless of the levels of hostility and tension between States - particularly between those possessing nuclear weapons - and of progress with confidence-building measures (CBMs) such as enhanced transparency of existing nuclear arsenals. We emphasise that the current increased tensions between nuclear weapon states is only a further urgent reason to seek to further CBMs and nuclear arsenal reductions.

We must simultaneously advance non-proliferation and disarmament as mutually reinforcing processes and create a more peaceful world. Practical contributions we can make would be to publicly commit to reducing our reliance on nuclear weapons for security; to initiate national dialogues on means of resolving the dilemma of supporting disarmament while maintaining alliances with Nuclear Weapon States; and to explore the implications for our States of a legal prohibition of nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, we will continue to support parallel efforts, such as those to unblock the Conference on Disarmament; begin negotiations for a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty; and bring into force the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Nuclear Weapon States must make efforts to achieve further cuts in their nuclear arsenals as soon as possible, **de-alert** nuclear warheads and – following our example – reduce the role and significance of nuclear weapons in their defence doctrines. They should also commit to cease production of any new nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency's powers of inspection, verification and reporting on global proliferation risks must also be strengthened.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is the cornerstone for progress towards total nuclear disarmament

As agreed in Article VI of the NPT a multilateral framework or treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control will have to be negotiated to underpin a world without nuclear weapons. But we have to accept that the hard practical work necessary to bring us closer to a world free of nuclear weapons must still be done. We need to work methodically and with realism if we are going to attain the necessary confidence and transparency to bring about nuclear disarmament. There are no short cuts.

We look forward to a productive and inclusive discussion at the Third Conference on the Humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in Vienna which should contribute to a successful outcome of the NPT Review Conference in 2015.