

Towards a Nuclear Free World – Our Next Generation

Tēnā koutou i tēnei ahiahi

Good evening to each and every one of you, and thank you for joining us here in the Banquet Hall tonight. I'm sure the Mayor of Porirua, Mike Tana who is with us tonight is very proud of this community orchestra that comes right out of the heart of Porirua.

Please join me in extending round of applause for the extremely gifted Virtuoso Strings Children's Orchestra for their beautiful and fitting contribution to this evening's event.

Having a children's orchestra play here tonight encompasses the importance of working together to create peace and harmony. Because we know, the antithesis of peace and harmony is the use of nuclear weapons.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of Robin Halliday Life Member of the United Nations Association of New Zealand who instigated this event. I want to also

acknowledge the Minister of Disarmament and Arms Control the Rt Hon Winston Peters who has delegated this important Under Secretary responsibility to me and it is a pleasure to host this event tonight.

I want to thank the United Nations Association New Zealand Wellington Branch for the work they do in continuing the cause of a nuclear free world and for their wish to pass their baton on to our next generation.

It's great to see so many Embassies here tonight, this is a testament to your support and commitment of this goal towards a Nuclear Free world and what this means for our next generation. And thank you to my team in Wellington for the dedication and time you have put into tonight's event.

Now more than ever we need to come together, to step forward together and continue to advocate for nuclear disarmament. At a time when risks to global peace and security are growing and

the rules-based system is under such pressure, we must recommit ourselves to the cause of non-proliferation and disarmament.

Part of National Identity

New Zealand has a long-held policy of opposing nuclear weapons, in fact one could go so far as to say that for many New Zealanders our nuclear-free stance is part of our national identity, part of who we are as a small Pacific country. New Zealand found out during its dedicated and strong campaign for a seat on the Security Council that the **number one brand** the UN membership associated with New Zealand was disarmament in fact - *nuclear* disarmament. Certainly we are well-known internationally for the stance.

Earlier this year when our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern gave a speech to New Zealand's Institute of International Affairs about New Zealand's foreign policy, she singled out disarmament as one of the two issues she thinks New Zealand

should be pursuing on the international stage with more vigour, the other being climate change.

In fact what she said was “the pursuit of disarmament is as vital today as it was when Norman Kirk and David Lange proclaimed New Zealand’s opposition to nuclear weapons and nuclear testing in the Pacific” and I couldn’t agree more.

During that speech, the Prime Minister also announced the reinstatement of the Cabinet position of Minister of Disarmament and Arms Control, to the Rt Hon Winston Peters. An important statement to once again emphasise the New Zealand Government’s long held anti-nuclear stance, and the role we must play going forward.

Looking for progress on nuclear disarmament is nothing new for New Zealanders. Many of you in this room tonight are sure to recall the rich history of the nuclear-free protest movement of the 1970’s and 1980’s. In fact, truth be told, some of you may have even participated in a rally or two yourselves.

Indeed many joined the thousands of New Zealanders aghast as tens of thousands of nuclear weapons were threatening the very existence of human life. Under the terms of the 50-year old Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, most states gave up the option of developing their own nuclear weapons in return for an undertaking from those already possessing them to move forward on disarmament. Yet despite the efforts of the NPT, there is now an alarming possibility that the deal established might start to unravel, as Nuclear Weapon States fail to meet their side of the bargain.

UN Secretary-General Guterres recently warned that “the current nuclear risks we face are unacceptable, and they are growing”. It is the unacceptability of these risks that is certainly part of the backstory to the new Treaty – the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – which a decisive majority of the international community (122 in total) including New Zealand and most of our Pacific neighbours endorsed at the United Nations in July last year.

The Prohibition Treaty looks to shore up the NPT and certainly complements its object and purpose, by moving forward on the NPT's disarmament undertaking.

You might even view the Prohibition Treaty as the global version of our own region's South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone – which was established by Forum Leaders in 1985 in the Treaty of Rarotonga. Indeed, it timely to note PM Puna's recent comments on nuclear disarmament. When announcing the accession last week of the Cook Islands to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, he called on fellow Forum Leaders to again demonstrate global leadership through joining the new Prohibition Treaty

Here in New Zealand we are genuinely proud of the fact that we have ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which took place in July of this year.

It is particularly pleasing that we join Palau and the Cook Islands as other members of the World's newest nuclear-free treaty.

Later this year in Auckland, between 5-7 December, New Zealand will host a conference for supporters of the Treaty from the Pacific region, to further discuss the Treaty and work through its text. This will be a fantastic opportunity for supporters of the Treaty from the Pacific to continue to work together on these very important issues. Pleasingly at the same time there will also be a Forum held for Youth, where young people mainly from New Zealand, some from the Pacific, and potentially some international students, will have the opportunity to discuss the Prohibition Treaty as well as nuclear disarmament more generally.

This is particularly noteworthy, as it again exemplifies the value this government places not only on disarmament as a global issue, but on the importance of involving youth in the

discussion about how we move the dial forward. In fact it was at a ceremony just last month where the UN's High Representative for Disarmament Affairs said "The future of our children and of our children's children depends on it".

This Government is serious about tackling disarmament and that is why I am pleased to announce an increase in funding available for disarmament education for activities that promote greater understanding of disarmament and arms control, as well as contributing to advancing New Zealand's disarmament interests.

Conclusion

When New Zealand ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in July of this year, this coalition government sent a clear message about our abiding commitment to a nuclear weapon-free world. We proudly joined 122 other Governments who adopted the text of the historic treaty that categorically outlawed nuclear weapons. This cannot be

overstated, it was a poignant moment in the modern disarmament context.

Each and every one of us has a role to play if we are to truly rid the world of the threat of nuclear weapons.

The treaty requires 50 countries to ratify it before it comes into force. So far 59 countries have signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and 15 have ratified it.

I would like to encourage everyone here to do what they can, whether as a member of civil society or as an Embassy representative, to achieve further uptake of the Treaty.

To finish, I would like highlight comments made recently by Cook Islands Prime Minister Puna: “we in the Pacific are all too aware of the cataclysmic effects of nuclear weapons, to this day some of our people are still suffering the devastating

effects of nuclear testing carried out in our region more than 30 years ago”.

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