



Statement by H.E Dell Higgle
Ambassador for Disarmament &
Permanent Representative to the CD

UNGA73: First Committee

10 October 2018

Mr Chair,

The New Zealand Delegation extends its best wishes to you, Ambassador Ioan Jinga, as you guide the First Committee of UNGA 73 through its survey of the year's developments in multilateral disarmament and international security.

There are indeed some positives to be logged on this year's balance sheet – and there are some encouraging signs that this might be the case with regard to developments on the Korean Peninsula. Overall, however, it is difficult to be optimistic, including in the face of ongoing conflicts in a number of regions and significant breaches of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Multilateral endeavours in a range of contexts are under threat. Of particular concern to *this* Committee must be the fact that there seems now to be much less attachment to the letter, as well as the spirit, of past disarmament and non-proliferation undertakings.

This is certainly apparent in the nuclear context where tensions between nuclear-armed states are on the increase. My Delegation was particularly struck by the observation of Secretary-General Guterres at last month's International Day for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons that “the global security environment has deteriorated, making progress in nuclear disarmament more difficult - yet also more important”. It would be hard, I think, to disagree with this sentiment - and probably equally hard to present the international community with a vicious circle of cause and effect of any greater consequence for us all than this one.

For New Zealand, for our New Agenda Coalition colleagues, and for the overwhelming majority of the UN membership, the increasing risks associated with nuclear weapons - including as a result of technological developments -

alongside their humanitarian consequences, lend real urgency to the need for progress on nuclear disarmament.

For our part, New Zealand has done all that is in the power of a non-possessor of nuclear weapons to advance the disarmament cause including, most recently, via our ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. At the same time, we maintain our longstanding advocacy - for instance, as a member of the De-alerting Group – calling for the adoption of transitional steps toward the elimination of these weapons.

We welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General, notably through his “Agenda for Disarmament” released in May this year, to inject momentum into the nuclear debate and to call for tangible progress in implementing existing commitments on nuclear disarmament. As he noted recently: “Disarmament remains essential for sustaining nonproliferation. They are two sides of the same coin. Backward movement on one will inevitably lead to backward movement on the other.”

The international community must also strenuously resist backward movement on legally-binding undertakings in the context of *other* weapons of mass destruction – chemical and biological (and certainly with respect to obligations governing *conventional* weapons as well). If we fail to do so and if, for instance, the range of recent violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention – in Syria, in Malaysia and the UK - continue to meet with impunity, we risk a reversion to what the Secretary-General (when referring in his Agenda to recent uses of chemical and potentially of biological weapons) has aptly termed a “moral dark age”. Were this to be the case, those caught up in situations of armed conflict – whether civilians or military – could rely on few of the advances in International Humanitarian Law hard-won since the First World War.

Accordingly, we endorse the Secretary-General’s proposals regarding establishment of an investigative capacity into allegations of use, as well as for a coordinated response framework to any *actual* use, of biological weapons. We support, too, his call for new leadership and unity in acting to restore respect for the global norm against chemical weapons and we continue to give our strong support to recent efforts in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to work towards a mechanism for formally identifying perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks so that they can properly be held to account.

Mr Chair,

The most significant gain for IHL in the context of conventional weaponry during the current decade has been the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) with its specific prohibitions intended to prevent arms transfers that result, *inter alia*, in attacks against civilians and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. Now in its fourth year of operation, it is clear that the Treaty has some way to go - in terms of implementation as well as universalisation – before we can be confident that it is on track to make real inroads into the devastating impact resulting from illicit or irresponsibly traded arms.

Small arms and light weapons remain the primary enabler of armed violence on a daily basis. We welcome the Secretary-General's intention to redress what he acknowledges has hitherto been "fragmented and limited" efforts by the UN to address the problems caused by illicit small arms and to establish a new Fund – a single platform – as a channel for international assistance for the control of small arms and light weapons. New Zealand was pleased to announce in June this year a contribution of NZ\$100,000 to the new Fund. We would hope that the Fund will prove instrumental in reducing illicit arms flows and that, over time, it can play its part in advancing the principles and purposes of the ATT and improving human security, including in our own part of the Pacific.

The Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament concludes with his hope that the Agenda will serve as a catalyst for disarmament – with all the positive outcomes that flow from disarmament measures – to be restored to the centre of the international community's common efforts for peace and security. This Committee has a very important role to play in this process and a fundamental responsibility also to watch over IHL and States' compliance with their disarmament and non-proliferation undertakings.

Thank you, Mr Chair.