



**Statement by Ms. Charlotte Skerten
DPR to the Conference on Disarmament**

**UNGA 74 First Committee
Nuclear Debate Statement**

22 October 2019

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour of taking the floor on behalf of the De-alerting Group – Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria, Sweden, Switzerland and my own country New Zealand – on the important issue of decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems, also known as de-alerting.

The De-alerting Group was established in 2007. Since then, we have consistently called upon those States that maintain nuclear weapons systems on high alert to de-alert them – both as a concrete step toward nuclear disarmament and as a risk reduction measure.

We agree with the Secretary-General's view, presented in his Agenda for Disarmament, of the urgency of risk reduction and of nuclear disarmament – and we agree, too, that de-alerting should be an issue on which there is strong international consensus.

In his address to the Conference on Disarmament this year, the UN Secretary General also urged the development of risk reduction measures that “would help to alleviate tensions and bring us back from the nuclear brink.” The risks posed by nuclear weapons will remain as long as these weapons exist. It is well known that these risks multiply significantly when nuclear weapons are on high alert – risks such as inadvertent launches due to technical failure or operator error; the possibility of misinterpretation of early warning data; failures of, and false reports by, early warning systems; and use of nuclear weapons by

unauthorised actors such as rogue military units, terrorists or cyber-attackers. It is also widely acknowledged, including by former military leaders from those States with the largest nuclear arsenals, that de-alerting is of most value during times of heightened tensions – times such as now. Against this backdrop, the case for urgent action on de-alerting should be compelling.

This is not just a theoretical concern but one substantiated by the significant history of accidents and close calls, particularly on the part of those in possession of the largest nuclear arsenals. Over the past decades, both the US and Russia have received erroneous information from early warning sensors or have misinterpreted warning data. In each case we have been extraordinarily fortunate that disaster has been averted. But given the devastating consequences of any use of nuclear weapons, deliberate or accidental, it is not sufficient to have to continue our reliance on good fortune.

Mr Chair,

We regret that some nuclear weapon States have moved away from their earlier acknowledgement of the risks of having nuclear forces on high alert. Efforts to defend or promote the retention of nuclear weapons on high-alert status reflect a shift away from existing commitments. At this time of heightened international tension, stability would best be served by the fulfilment of existing obligations and commitments.

At last year's UNGA, 175 States voted in favour of our Group's resolution on "Decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems", with a significant number of states also co-sponsoring it. This sent a clear message about the need to renew efforts to ensure that commitments to reduce the operational readiness of nuclear weapons on high alert are fulfilled. We intend to take this issue forward at the 2020 Review Conference next year.

Some twelve years after the establishment of the De-alerting Group, our message has only become more urgent. The nuclear weapon states should immediately implement previously agreed commitments on de-alerting and

take steps to rapidly reduce operational readiness – unilaterally, bilaterally or multilaterally – and ensure that all nuclear weapons are removed from high alert status.

We look forward to working together in relevant fora to make much needed progress on de-alerting.

Thank you Mr Chair.

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