



## CNS Diplomatic Workshop on (Still) Preparing for the Tenth NPT Review Conference

Presentation by Ambassador Lucy Duncan

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*Tēnā koutou katoa*

In the language of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, I offer warm greetings to you all.

Thank you to the James Martin Centre for Non-Proliferation for inviting me to contribute remarks.

I see many familiar faces on the Zoom screen – some of you my new colleagues in Geneva where I am Permanent Representative to the United Nations as well as Disarmament Ambassador; and some of you my colleagues from the distant past - Geneva and Vienna in the 1990s even Buenos Aires!

I acknowledge the depth and breadth of wisdom and experience in this workshop. I acknowledge also that I stand on the shoulders of my New Zealand Disarmament Ambassador colleagues who have led our disarmament diplomacy over the years – the first being Clive Pearson, sadly departed, and the last being Dell Higginson who has recently retired.

I begin my address in this way because, for Aotearoa New Zealand, our foreign policy – including nuclear disarmament policy – is intergenerational. As *kaitiaki*, which translates as guardians of our country, people and planet, New Zealand diplomats are charged with acting in the world for the benefit of current and future generations.

This feels to me highly relevant to our themes at this workshop, and I will turn now to the three guiding questions in the programme.

The first of which is: *What are the major substantive issues before the Review Conference?* It won't come as a surprise to any of you that I expect the first pillar to find itself the home of the most difficult debates. I'm expecting difficult discussions on how we should characterize developments over the past six years. And probably even *more* challenging debates about what additional measures towards nuclear disarmament can be agreed by the NPT membership.

So, *what should the "big purpose" of this conference be?* In my view, it should be to demonstrate that the NPT membership *can* make meaningful progress on Article VI. It is, quite simply, unacceptable that over 13,000 nuclear warheads remain in the world today – the vast majority of which are possessed by Parties to our Treaty. It is often unacknowledged, but the risks of a nuclear detonation are continuing to grow.

Meanwhile, the effects of nuclear testing continue to be felt, generations later, with devastating impacts. In recent years, we have also witnessed concerning developments relating to the modernisation and expansion of arsenals, as well as reductions in transparency. And long-term investments in nuclear weapon capabilities are raising doubts about whether the Nuclear Weapons States *ever* intend to reduce their reliance on these weapons and disarm.

So, I think that it will be absolutely critical to demonstrate that progress on nuclear disarmament is, in fact, still possible under this Treaty, more than 50 years after its entry into force and over 25 years following its indefinite extension. That extension was only possible with the unequivocal undertaking by Nuclear Weapons States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. There is a real and urgent need in particular for all Nuclear Weapons States to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to fulfilling their obligations.

Turning now to the second question: *What are the goals and visions of various states' and groupings'?*

Aotearoa New Zealand is part of three key groups of relevance:

First, the **New Agenda Coalition**, a cross-regional group of six countries - Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, South Africa and New Zealand. We first banded together in 1998 as a result of our concern that the indefinite extension of the NPT was being interpreted by the Nuclear Weapons States as endorsing the indefinite *possession* of nuclear weapons. Developments since 1998 have only intensified this concern. So the NAC continues to push for concrete progress towards nuclear disarmament in accordance with Article VI of the NPT. Some of the NAC's proposals are ambitious, and we make no apology for this.

Second, New Zealand is also part of the more recent "**Stockholm**" Initiative for nuclear disarmament – a group of 16 States which aims to strengthen the NPT by building *political* support for progress under Article VI. As well as the set of 22 "stepping stones" for advancing nuclear disarmament, published last February, this group has recently released a working paper on nuclear risk reduction, and our Ministers plan to meet again in early July. Other NPT members are also welcome to support the Initiative's efforts.

And last, but certainly not least, New Zealand is part of the **De-Alerting Group** – a group of six States focused exclusively on lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapons. With approximately 1,800 warheads sitting on hair trigger alert status today, ready to be launched at a moment's notice, taking action on de-alerting seems to be an obvious place to start when the NPT membership is looking for measures to reduce the risks associated with nuclear weapons.

New Zealand also remains firmly committed to ensuring that the **humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons**, and the motivation they give to urgent disarmament efforts, are reflected in the RevCon outcome. This is a shared purpose among many States, if not that of a specific grouping.

Turning now to the final question: *What major developments and factors are likely to affect debates at the RevCon?*

First and foremost, I think that the **relationship among the Nuclear Weapons States**, and whether they can demonstrate an ability to engage as a group to make progress on nuclear disarmament, will be the most crucial factor. While all States have a legitimate standing in seeking the elimination of nuclear weapons, it will be difficult to make the significant progress that is necessary under Article VI

without the commitment of the Nuclear Weapons States. It would be fantastic to see these States working together now, and in the final months leading up to the RevCon, to maximize its chances of success. The Biden-Putin summit next week in Geneva, for example, will provide an important opportunity for the two largest nuclear weapons possessors to demonstrate their willingness to cooperate. A positive outcome would go a long way to improving atmospherics ahead of the RevCon.

Second, how the focus we are witnessing on **nuclear risk reduction** plays out in practical terms at the RevCon will, I think, also be a determining factor of its success. New Zealand agrees that nuclear risk reduction is important and that it can play a useful role in helping to pave the way towards nuclear disarmament. For an outcome on nuclear risk reduction to be plausible, it will need to take a broad approach and include ambitious and practical measures such as those in the Stockholm Initiative paper. These would need to be discussed alongside – and in addition to – concrete disarmament measures, as the two are clearly not substitutes.

One final development I wanted to touch on is the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**. As you know, the Treaty has entered into force – in fact it now has 54 States Parties and 32 additional signatories. Indeed, it may have had its first Meeting of States Parties before the RevCon. States that support the TPNW believe it represents significant progress under Article VI. But, in my view, the TPNW need *not* be a contentious topic at the RevCon. Of course we will need to agree on language to recognise this development, but we are certainly capable of doing this. As a TPNW supporter, New Zealand's engagement will be respectful – we will be clear about the benefits we see the Treaty bringing, while also listening to the views of others who do not currently support it. We would ask that all States approach it in the same way and that those who do not support the Treaty focus instead on what concrete actions they are taking to achieve the effective measures for nuclear disarmament demanded by Article VI of the NPT.

To conclude, I recognise the challenges facing the NPT membership and do not for a moment underestimate the difficulties that lie ahead for us in achieving a successful consensus outcome. But I see this RevCon as an opportunity to break the cycle of division and inefficiency in our key disarmament fora, at a time when they are needed the most. Aotearoa New Zealand remains steadfast in our view that forward movement on nuclear disarmament is both critical and achievable.

For inspiration, as it will be hard work ahead, I close by sharing with you a Maori proverb:

*Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tūohu koe, he maunga teitei*

Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you should bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain.

It means to achieve something truly valuable, we must aim high, be persistent and not let obstacles stop us from reaching our goal.

*Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.*