FIRST MEETING OF STATES PARTIES TO THE TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

22 JUNE 2022

NEW ZEALAND GENERAL DEBATE STATEMENT

DELIVERED BY

HON PHIL TWYFORD
MINISTER FOR DISARMAMENT AND ARMS CONTROL
Thank you, Mr President. I extend my warm congratulations to you on the assumption of the Presidency of this inaugural meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. You have New Zealand’s full support – here in this room, and oceans away.

It is my honour to represent New Zealand at this meeting. As Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control, it is humbling to spend this week with brave survivors of nuclear weapons use and testing, and with the states, international organisations and civil society representatives who – like New Zealand – remain determined to ensure nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances.

This determination has never been more necessary.

Despite what we know about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and their growing risks, nine states still possess the destructive firepower to end life as we know it. Disarmament efforts have slowed, and in some cases reversed, with nuclear arsenals are being modernised and expanded, at the cost of billions of dollars.

President Putin’s nuclear mobilisation orders and threat of use of nuclear weapons in Russia’s illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine have brought us once more to the brink of a nuclear catastrophe.

North Korea’s ongoing efforts to develop its nuclear weapons programme provide clear evidence of the proliferation consequences of nuclear weapons remaining the coercive weapon of choice.

But we cannot be intimidated or discouraged. We must protect and preserve humanity and the rule of law. We must do all we can to prevent the nuclear nightmare from ever becoming a reality. And in New Zealand’s view, this Treaty is a significant step in that very direction.

It has been inspiring to see membership of the Treaty grow, and I am proud that ten of its first fifty parties were from the Pacific – a region bearing the scars of decades of nuclear testing.

Being here, surrounded by partners from the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, central and South East Asia and Europe, is a clear reminder that our
mission is global. Our different geographies, histories, cultures and politics have led us all to the same conclusion – that nuclear weapons are immoral and illegal, and their tyranny must end.

I am also encouraged by the participation of observers in this meeting – observers who have not signed up to the Treaty but who share the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. Your engagement, at a time where communication, trust and confidence-building are so essential, is welcome and appreciated.

The agenda ahead of us is full. We have important decisions to take to ensure this Treaty continues down its road to success. A sound decision on deadlines for the fulfilment of the Treaty’s disarmament obligations will be critical, and I am pleased we can draw on the experiences of other key disarmament treaties in doing so.

We must establish a serious inter-sessional process on verification to build knowledge and experience, and to take decisions when needed, for full implementation of Article 4 of the Treaty.

And we must set the direction for implementation of the positive obligations in Article 6 and 7 of the Treaty, facilitated by the expert leadership of Kazakhstan and Kiribati. More than any other aspect of the Treaty, it is work on this issue that best captures the humanitarian drivers at the heart of our mission.

At the same time, I look forward to the decisions that will extend the partnership of states, international organisations and civil society that has been so critical to the Treaty to date. From the adoption earlier today of our rules of procedure, to the creation of an intersessional structure and Scientific Advisory Group, to agreement on a comprehensive action plan, you can count on New Zealand as a steadfast supporter and active participant in our Treaty’s future.

Let us focus now on our immediate tasks, and have confidence that the message we will send from our first meeting is one of commitment to – and resolute belief in – the necessary and urgent elimination of nuclear weapons. A message we will carry also to the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Mr President, Nuclear weapons are never the answer. But our Treaty can be.

Thank you.