

**68th session of the General Assembly
First Committee**

Nuclear Disarmament Cluster

**Decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear
weapons systems**

New York, 18 October 2013

Mr. Chair,

I have the honour of taking the floor on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Nigeria on the issue of de-alerting, or decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

Although the Cold War ended more than two decades ago, close to 2,000 warheads are estimated to be ready for use on short notice, meaning that the decision-making time for launch is counted in minutes. Our countries have for a number of years called for action to address this issue of concern to the international community.

Our call for action is informed by the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. It is informed by the fundamental questions arising from the maintenance on high alert of weapons that have enormous destructive capacity and that pose a threat to the survival of humanity.

It is a deep and constant concern that this dangerous feature of Cold War doctrine is perpetuated today. While tensions that marked the international security climate during the Cold War have lowered significantly, corresponding decreases in the alert levels of the arsenals of the largest nuclear-weapon states have not been forthcoming.

The concerns caused by maintaining nuclear weapons on a high level of readiness are compounded by worrying developments in cyber-warfare. Cyber-related attacks on nuclear command and control systems or on nuclear weapons themselves cannot be ruled out, and the possibility of such attacks on nuclear weapons maintained on a high-level could represent a clear new danger. We welcome that some nuclear-weapon States are now looking more closely at these yet unknown risks.

A lowered operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems would represent an important disarmament step towards a world free of nuclear weapons. It would represent a confidence-building measure and would demonstrate a commitment to diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines. It remains also our strong view that progress in lowering operational readiness would have positive effects not only on international but also on human security.

We acknowledge and welcome progress that has been made in the past. The level of operational readiness of non-strategic nuclear weapons has been considerably lowered and decisions to stand down strategic bombers have also been taken. These examples highlight that de-alerting is possible and that technical and political obstacles can be overcome.

We remain concerned that these initial first steps, which were taken at the end of the Cold War, have not been complemented by additional measures. Lowering alert levels is closely linked to reducing the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines. In this context, we take note that the new Nuclear Weapons Employment Guidance issued by the US earlier this year directs the Department of Defense to examine and reduce the role of "launch under attack" in contingency

We are also encouraged by the numerous calls made by former high-ranking officials from nuclear-weapon States arguing in favour of the necessity and feasibility of reducing the level of operational readiness of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Chair,

Our delegations presented a resolution on *Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons* to the 67th session of the General Assembly as well as to previous sessions. We are pleased at the strong and growing support for the resolution, which demonstrates this Assembly's collective commitment to a diminishing role for nuclear weapons and its recognition that reducing alert levels is an important interim step towards a nuclear-weapon-free world.

2014 will represent a key milestone in the implementation of the commitments made in the NPT framework by the nuclear-weapon States regarding de-alerting. Next year's reporting by the nuclear-weapon States on the implementation of the different provisions set forth in Action 5 of the 2010 Action Plan, including on *further reducing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems*, will enable States parties to assess whether, and to what extent, progress has been made in lowering the alert rate of nuclear weapons. Moreover, this reporting will inform decisions regarding further action in this area.

While we will not submit a resolution to the First Committee this year, we will continue to spare no efforts in advocating for progress towards lowering operational readiness in all relevant fora and intend to revisit our resolution next year.

I thank you for your attention.