



New Zealand Permanent Mission  
to the United Nations

Te Māngai Pihoro

UNGA 68: First Committee  
General Statement

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11 October 2013

New Zealand welcomes, once again, the opportunity the First Committee gives us - this time under the guidance of Ambassador Ibrahim Dabbashi as our Chair - to review the past year's disarmament and arms control balance sheet and to outline some of our aspirations for the year ahead. We associate ourselves with the statement delivered earlier this week by Egypt on behalf of the New Agenda Coalition.

I think that without question the big 'win' this last year has been the successful conclusion and adoption by the General Assembly of the Arms Trade Treaty. As Secretary-General Ban has said, the ATT advances global efforts to bring the rule of law to the conventional arms trade. This is no mean feat.

The overwhelming support for the Treaty is amply demonstrated by the fact that there are already 113 signatories - my country among them - certainly an unusually high number at such an early stage in the lifespan of a treaty. I would particularly wish to congratulate those seven countries which have already, within four months of its adoption, ratified it. Others, I know, will follow shortly. Forty-three to go - and then the ATT enters into force!

Increasingly over time, the Treaty will contribute significantly to the protection of civilian populations and to improved regional and global security. It is, then, a real win - for the security both of states as well as for human security - in its own terms. It does not need to be cited also as proof that the UN can 'do something'. This, for my Delegation, has never been in doubt: the UN has always been able to do something - when and if we, its members, don't stand in the way.

It is not lost on New Zealand that the ATT came into being because our mode of operation during its negotiation was broadly based on UN General Assembly procedures - and throughout the negotiations, the ATT process retained the option - ultimately indeed taken up - to revert completely to standard UNGA rules of procedure. In this process, at least, the will of the very few has not been allowed to trump the interests of the vast majority.

Another 'win' in the sphere of conventional arms this year was demonstrated very recently when States Parties to the Oslo Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) met last month in Lusaka. Like the Ottawa Landmines Convention, the CCM is another essential instrument of international humanitarian law (IHL) serving to protect civilians from the indiscriminate effects of weapon systems. The norm it establishes already has considerable force on the international stage and any usage of cluster munitions - such as occurred most recently in Syria - has been met with strong condemnation.

Steady progress on universalisation is apparent both as regards the Ottawa and Oslo Treaties. We hope that Zambia's aspiration, as this year's President of the Convention, to see Africa be the first continent to subscribe universally to the CCM is indeed successful. As the Convention's Coordinator for National Implementation, New Zealand has also offered its

assistance to Ghana as host for the meeting to be held next March to draft a pan-Africa model of implementing legislation.

Many, if not all, of us here would say that the big 'loss' of the year just past has been the horrific use of chemical weapons – an extraordinarily inhumane, and outlawed, weapon of mass destruction - in Syria. Rightly, those weapons are now being destroyed and one can say that the rule of law on this issue is being re-established there.

That of course can be of little real comfort to the Syrian citizens, or their grieving families, who were the victims of these weapons. Nor are they likely to draw comfort from the probability that their plight has served to highlight the anomaly that the most destructive and uncivilised of all weapons – nuclear weapons – remain the only weapons of mass destruction not banned by an international treaty.

The multilateral negotiating forum charged with dealing with that problem – the Conference on Disarmament - rests in paralysis, unable, for instance, to begin implementing any of the three tasks assigned it under the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Action Plan (viz Action 6 on the establishment of a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament, Action 7 regarding the commencement of discussions on security assurances, or Action 15 calling for negotiations on a treaty on fissile material). While there were further efforts this year to break the impasse in the CD, we have yet to see a corresponding willingness to move beyond the entrenched positions that block substantive work.

That said, for the first time in quite some while, my Delegation sees cause for optimism on the prospects for greater movement toward nuclear disarmament. Efforts to move beyond the last 17 years of much input, but no output, from the CD saw most of us attend the Oslo Conference in March. This ground-breaking initiative by the Government of Norway provided a platform to consider the humanitarian consequences of any nuclear weapon detonation. The safety of the ordinary citizen and the well-being of our planet in the wake of any usage of nuclear weapons were uppermost on the Oslo agenda. And on this agenda, nuclear weapons must surely score as low on the barometer as you can go.

New Zealand looks forward to the Conference to be hosted next February by the Government of Mexico which will continue to put the consequences of nuclear weapons for human security at the forefront of discussions on nuclear disarmament. We believe this will reinforce efforts to advance all the objectives of the NPT and not simply our shared responsibility to move forward on Article VI.

As coordinator at UNGA 68 for the Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons I would like to take this opportunity to advise all delegations that this text is available as of today - and we look forward, once again, to very widespread support for it.

This year's meetings of the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations were testament to the fact that the roadblock in the CD need not necessarily distract us from forward movement on nuclear disarmament. We welcomed the constructive discussions which took place at the OEWG under Ambassador Dengo's chairmanship and which were reflected in its final report presented to this Assembly. My Delegation particularly relished the opportunity to explore the implications of nuclear weapons for international law, including IHL. This is indeed the subject matter of a side event that New Zealand and Switzerland are sponsoring here at the First Committee on Friday 18 October.

We draw further optimism from the overwhelming support for nuclear disarmament evident at last month's High-Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament. In speaking at the HLM, my Prime Minister signalled his expectation that the international community must make better progress on nuclear disarmament.

We hope that the HLM will deliver new political impetus to help the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty deliver on its promises. The NPT's commitment to disarm was made at the same time and on the same basis as the commitment not to proliferate. We continue to call on all countries to live up to the promises on both sides of the ledger sheet and continue to call, as well, for the Treaty's universalisation. The meeting of next year's Prepcom, and decisions relating to the implementation of the 1995 Middle East Resolution including the convening of the 2012 Conference, will certainly be very important for the ongoing health and well-being of the NPT regime. In saying that, we do not, of course, overlook the strenuous efforts to bring about the 2012 Conference - especially on the part of Finland's Ambassador Laajava.

We continue to call for entry-into-force of the CTBT. A similar call is made in the annual CTBT resolution - coordinated this year by New Zealand. We very much welcome the Treaty's recent ratification by Brunei Darussalam, Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Iraq and continue to call on all states, Annex 2 states in particular, to follow this example and become party to the Treaty as soon as possible.

In taking stock of the year behind us and the year ahead, it is clear that there is both good and not-so-good news to record. In the good news category, I include above all the increased focus on the well-being and security of the individual within our societies, as well as the discernible emphasis on IHL and the importance of abiding by its terms. Of course, when we do not meet its requirements, or when we fail to move forward - for example on nuclear disarmament or on other aspects of the humanitarian agenda, it is almost always our individual citizens who are the ones to pay the price.