

123



Statement by

H.E. Dell Higgle

Ambassador for Disarmament and Permanent Representative of New Zealand
to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva

at the

2nd Preparatory Committee of 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

General Debate

Geneva, 23 April 2018

Mr Chair,

Allow me to convey New Zealand's congratulations to you, Ambassador Bugajski, on your leadership of this second Preparatory Committee (Prepcom) for the 2020 Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We welcome your work to date, and are particularly pleased that you have continued the pattern of extensive outreach which was set last year by your predecessor from The Netherlands. We are confident that the Asia/Pacific consultation on the Treaty held recently in Jakarta will have played its part in laying the foundation for constructive engagement here at this Prepcom.

For almost 5 decades now, the NPT has been the central element in New Zealand's international obligations relating to nuclear weapons. Over this period we have also signed on to other obligations in this context - most notably pursuant to our regional Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (the Treaty of Rarotonga) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty – as well as undertakings in relation, for example, to our membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

The confidence and sense of security provided by internationally-agreed rules is particularly valuable in times of heightened strategic tension. At such a time, the framework of international law, in particular International Humanitarian Law, gives vital reassurance that important constraints exist on the conduct and use of force by states. Undoubtedly, the international community is fortunate to have in place rules and undertakings regarding the most destructive of *all* weapon systems – nuclear weapons.

Last year, as part of our support for a rules-based international order and consistent with our long-standing commitment to nuclear disarmament, New Zealand lent its support to efforts to put in place a further international agreement in this field – the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – in order to supplement efforts within the NPT community to give reality to the obligation regarding nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the NPT.

Such new obligations do not - and cannot as a matter of international law - in any way displace the full span of obligations we already owe to all States Parties under the NPT. New Zealand will continue, as we have for nigh-on 50 years, to fully abide by these (at the same time as we maintain our legitimate expectation that all other Parties will meet *theirs*, including with respect to Article VI).

Clearly, International Humanitarian Law rules are of greatest value when the global community can have confidence that they will be complied with. Right now, however, there are a number of issues of considerable concern in this regard. Non-compliance with IHL obligations and norms is evident including in terms of chemical weapons usage in the war zone of Syria as well as outside any situation of conflict in Malaysia and the UK. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons and those responsible must be held to account. Another major challenge in recent years has been North Korea's violation of the norm against nuclear testing. In this context, however, we are pleased to note that there do appear to be promising developments; we particularly welcome news of the upcoming inter-Korea summit later this month April and the subsequent US-North Korea summit.

At the same time, in the rather more workaday context of this preparatory process here, we must not overlook the fact that there are further efforts we can make to enhance the compliance and non-proliferation aspects of the NPT including in order to strengthen and universalise comprehensive safeguards and safety and security mechanisms, as well as in support of the key role of export control regimes.

There is also considerable work required in order to implement Article VI and the undertakings the Nuclear Weapon States have made over a number of Review Conference outcomes in relation to that provision of the Treaty. The Working Paper presented to this Prepcom by the New Agenda Coalition (WP NPT/CONF.2020/WP13) has set out for ease of reference the full span of these commitments – many of which remain unfulfilled. Our Working Paper records our expectation that the obligations assumed in the Treaty relating to nuclear disarmament will be fulfilled with the same rigour which the international community is right to insist on in relation to all other IHL rules and undertakings.

To conclude, Mr Chair, I note that New Zealand associates itself with the statements and ambitions expressed here by all the various groupings to which we belong – not just the New Agenda Coalition but also the De-alerting Group and the Vienna Group of 10. We will amplify today's General Statement with more detailed remarks which we will deliver during the subsequent cluster debate. We would also draw attention to New Zealand's national report, which has been submitted as document NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/6.