Statement by

Hon Phil Twyford
Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control

at the

2022 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

General Debate

New York, 1 August 2022
Thank you, Mr President.

I extend my warm congratulations to you and assure you of the full cooperation of the New Zealand delegation.

I will get right to it.

Despite the NPT and the nuclear disarmament obligation enshrined in Article VI, we seem as far as ever from a world without nuclear weapons, and in real danger of moving backwards.

The decades-long trend of stockpile reductions is on the verge of reversal.

All nuclear weapon states have modernisation programmes underway, with billions of dollars invested in plans for the long-term possession of nuclear weapons.

The military doctrines of these states, and their alliance partners, continue to reflect an undiminished reliance on nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, experts tell us the risk of nuclear weapon use has increased dramatically. So, too, have dangerous rhetoric and exercises threatening such use.

We have seen this most recently from Russia, in the lead up to and following its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine – an invasion which has shattered the value of negative security assurances. New Zealand condemns Russia’s actions in the strongest possible terms.

Mr President

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has made clear New Zealand’s strong view that the legacy of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine must not be an arms race, or a more polarised and dangerous world. What is needed is an equal commitment to international institutions, multilateral forums, and disarmament.

But rather than realising the security dividends history has proven can accrue from nuclear arms control and disarmament measures – such as those agreed by Krushchev and Kennedy, Reagan and Gorbachev – the nuclear weapon states and many of their allies are doubling down on deterrence.

This puts at risk not just the disarmament pillar of the NPT, but the non-proliferation pillar as well. After all, if the most powerful militaries in the world need nuclear weapons to feel safe, why shouldn’t everyone have them too?
That is not an argument that New Zealand can subscribe to, not just because of our legal obligations under both the NPT and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons but because of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. More nuclear weapons – whether in the hands of the existing nuclear weapons states or others – will not make us safer.

New Zealand remains steadfast in our opposition to the DPRK’s unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. We are deeply concerned about outstanding questions regarding Iran’s nuclear programme, and regret the JCPOA has yet to be restored.

New Zealand wants this Review Conference to strengthen non-proliferation, promote nuclear safety and security, and facilitate the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. But I make no apology that our primary concern is the pursuit of a credible outcome on disarmament.

For too many years the statements by nuclear weapon states in support of nuclear disarmament have not been matched by action, and the growing gap between promise and delivery is placing unsustainable pressure on this Treaty.

We have agreed at previous Review Conferences to break the goal of disarmament down into smaller, supposedly more achievable steps, such as the entry into force of the CTBT or the negotiation of a fissile material treaty. But even these have not been implemented.

Instead, progress is reported on internal P5 discussions, disarmament verification processes, and languishing initiatives in the Conference on Disarmament. But where it really matters – on significant stockpile reductions and efforts to reduce reliance on nuclear weapons – there hasn’t been much progress to report in the last 20 years.

And, almost without exception, the justification for this by the nuclear weapon states has been that the global security environment is not conducive to nuclear disarmament. The logic of nuclear weapon states is that insecurity and instability render us incapable of doing the very thing that would make the world less insecure and less unstable.

In today’s deteriorating security situation this approach is simply not sustainable.
We must reach agreement that restores confidence in the intention of the nuclear weapon states to fulfil their disarmament obligations and commitments, and which puts us clearly and irreversibly on a path to doing so.

Mr President,

Progress on disarmament cannot be deferred any longer, whatever other challenges we are facing nationally, regionally or as an international community. While our national voices will reflect diverse positions on these challenges, our collective voice at the end of the Conference must demonstrate consensus on the importance of the NPT and our unwavering commitment to its full implementation.