



New Zealand Intervention

**Agenda item 9
Thematic Discussion on the Humanitarian
Impact of Nuclear Weapons**

**Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
Second Meeting of States Parties**

27 November – 1 December 2023

Chair,

New Zealand is grateful to the President for hosting this important discussion, as part of broader discussions on this topic first begun at Oslo in 2013, continuing in Nayarit, and then Vienna the next year. We consider it deeply appropriate that these discussions resumed in Vienna in 2022, coinciding with the TPNW's first meeting of States Parties.

The key issues being addressed in this thematic discussion have real resonance for New Zealand. Certainly, this includes New Zealand's long history, and that of our region, in opposing nuclear testing – and, indeed, any use of nuclear weapons.

Our awareness of the horrific and indiscriminate destructive power of nuclear weapons underpins our approach. As well as the terrible effects of the detonation of nuclear weapons over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, New Zealand and other countries of the Pacific have also borne witness to the humanitarian consequences of testing of nuclear weapons in our region. Some of our near-neighbours in the Pacific still, today, continue to live with the environmental and health effects of the testing decades later.

The TPNW is a tremendous achievement in so far as it recognises and seeks to respond to the demonstrable humanitarian impacts nuclear weapons

have had, and which would almost certainly be catastrophic if used again. It is also a recent achievement, and an achievement with a long lineage, in which New Zealand has played its part alongside partners in our region, and around the world.

With support from others, New Zealand took its concerns with the nuclear testing occurring in our region to the highest international tribunal – the International Court of Justice - in the 1970s and then in the 1990s. In the 1990s we also supported the issuance of an International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the legality of nuclear weapons, and were active in promoting negotiation and adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and continue to advocate for its Entry into Force.

In the Pacific, we joined with our regional partners and moved forward with our own rule-making, including prohibiting testing in our part of the world, by putting in place a nuclear weapons-free zone (via the Treaty of Rarotonga) in 1985, which shares the objectives of the TPNW in pursuing a world free of nuclear weapons. And today, we are pleased to say that the majority of Pacific Island Countries are also TPNW members. All of these outcomes are driven at least in part by significant humanitarian concern.

The actions that we have taken were underpinned by our experience and our legacy. And this experience is supported by scientific evidence, which continues to emerge and accumulate, to reveal more about the multifaceted and cascading humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons. The startling resurgence of explicit nuclear threats and tensions in recent times serve as a stark reminder of the very real dangers we continue to face from nuclear weapons.

Decades of studies leave us entirely certain of the fact that nuclear war, even limited, would be a global catastrophe and a historic humanitarian

disaster. And recent studies help us to understand more about the sheer scale of humanitarian disaster that would occur.

We know now, for instance, that following a nuclear war it is possible that up to 5 billion people could starve to death in the resulting nuclear winter, and the deleterious effects on ecosystems could last for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

And even limited nuclear exchange focused on counterforce strikes would very likely result in mass civilian casualties. Recent studies have shown that even nuclear strikes on remote targets can deliver lethal doses of radiation to population centres hundreds of kilometres away.

We are also developing more a picture of the damage done to populations as a result of nuclear weapons testing. Revised estimates of the long-term health impacts from carbon-14 produced by nuclear test explosions in the atmosphere now suggest that several million people may eventually suffer serious harm as a result of tests.

The more we study humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, the more we understand about the depths of the horror these weapons have, and could again, inflict on civilian populations around the world.

That is why we support calls for further studies to be done across the breadth of potential impacts - impacts on current local, national, regional and global socioeconomic and political systems, supply chains, health care, food and energy systems and natural ecosystems.

Not only should we commit to study the humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons use that might happen, but we support calls to continue to study the humanitarian impact of the use that has already happened, not least

because this helps support TPNW States Parties to better understand and fulfil their obligations enshrined in Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty.

It is critically important that we understand more about the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons so that policy makers around the world can adapt and evolve their policies to reflect this new information. Treaty member of not, we do not have the luxury of ignorance about the terrible capacity inherent in these weapons to inflict excruciating misery, and destruction and death.

Thank you chair.