

**New Zealand Statement to Conference on Disarmament
High Level Session, February 2023
Hon Nanaia Mahuta**

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control

Madame President, Secretary-General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and friends. Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa, mai i tōku Whenua o Aotearoa.

The international security environment we find ourselves in is ever more fractured, fraught and challenging to navigate. As we mark the one year anniversary of Russia's illegal war against Ukraine, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to condemn, unequivocally, its invasion. Russia's actions have caused immense suffering.

Russia's nuclear threats have raised the risk of nuclear war to its highest level in many decades. This risk is further aggravated by the recent suspension of its participation in New START, and its efforts to undermine other disarmament fora – including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference held last year.

The major conflicts of the twentieth century taught us that international aggression must be resisted and that peaceful nations have to be prepared to stand together to do so. New Zealand will continue to support Ukraine's efforts to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Alongside this, strong multilateral institutions are required to underpin a peaceful global order—including in the area of arms control and disarmament. The legacy of Russia's invasion of Ukraine must not be a spiral towards greater nuclear peril. We need collective approaches to draw us back from that abyss.

Conflict and situations of serious tension continue around the world. We are confronted by North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear programmes in contravention of UN Security Council resolutions. We urge North Korea to abide by its international obligations and engage in constructive dialogue towards a lasting and stable peace on the Korean peninsula.

We regret that negotiations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme have stalled, and encourage all parties to try and find an effective

way forward. At the same time we call on Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Madame President, Aotearoa New Zealand remains deeply frustrated at the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament. Our concern is not only that nuclear disarmament has stalled, but that it appears to be in reverse – a concern evidenced by expanding and modernising nuclear arsenals, deep investments in future nuclear capabilities, ongoing reliance on nuclear weapons in military doctrine, and reduced transparency.

Those with nuclear weapons argue that the challenging global security environment means now is not the time to be pursuing nuclear disarmament. But history has shown us the security dividends that can accrue from nuclear arms control and disarmament measures. At times of crisis in the past such measures have brought us back from the brink of catastrophe. We find ourselves once more on the precipice, but without the guardrails we need. Trust and confidence is also missing - in particular that those with nuclear weapons ever intend to relinquish them. This needs to change.

Madame President, Aotearoa New Zealand is a Pacific nation. It was in our region that these weapons of war were tested. Those tests have left a permanent mark on the people, lands and waters of our home.

The only way to guarantee our people that they will be safe from the disastrous humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons is for these arms not to exist. That is why we urge universalisation and full implementation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

We are also committed to achieving a meaningful outcome from the forthcoming Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The use of chemical weapons in Syria and other locations has reinforced the urgency and importance of their elimination and of ensuring no impunity for those involved in their use.

Madame President, we have seen what can be possible when we come together to make the world safer. The political declaration agreed late last year on the use of Explosive Weapons In Populated Areas was an important measure, and we remain

committed to ensuring it delivers strengthened protection to civilians in conflict. We remain similarly dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems – challenges that we believe require urgent multilateral action through prohibition and regulation.

Madame President, the strength of this Conference lies in the expertise built up and shared among its membership. But we cannot consider the Conference on Disarmament an effective forum when it has persistently failed for so long to do that which it was set up to do: negotiate disarmament agreements.

New Zealand does not dispute the value of korero – discussion – in bringing states and peoples together. But we cannot only talk. More must be done to ensure the Conference on Disarmament fulfils its mandate.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa.

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