

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's discussion.

2010 has been a notable year for the disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control community.

After a decade of pessimism and disappointment, there has at last been real progress towards a range of important disarmament and non-proliferation objectives - foremost being the consensus outcome from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty Review Conference in May.

While not as strong as many of us would have liked, the Final Document does at least provide a clear roadmap for action over the next five years towards achieving the long-cherished goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.

We were particularly pleased that action plans were agreed for each of the NPT's three pillars - a significant achievement.

But, to have meaning, such outcomes must be translated into action, and the 2015 NPT Review Conference will be upon us all too quickly.

It is therefore incumbent on both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states to seize the opportunity presented by this year's consensus and begin work on implementing the action plans as a matter of priority.

The NPT RevCon Final Document sets out 64 Action Steps to be undertaken by States Parties; and I'd like to focus on just two specific areas in which New Zealand played an active role in advocating for action: decreased operational readiness; and nuclear transparency.

New Zealand is a member - together with Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria and Switzerland - of what is known as the "De-Alerting Group", which has, for some years, advocated decreased levels of operational readiness for nuclear weapons systems; removal of nuclear weapons systems from high alert status, in effect lengthening the "nuclear fuse" and increasing the time available for decisions on the use of such weapons.

Decreasing levels of operational readiness is important for several reasons –

- First, increased decision times when weapons systems are on lower levels of operational readiness would reduce the likelihood of their use in error, thereby lowering the threat posed by these weapons to the international community.
- Secondly, the process of working to agree on steps to implement reduced levels of operational readiness can be a useful confidence building measure between nuclear weapons states.

Moreover, lowered operational status for nuclear weapons systems would contribute to a climate in which reliance on nuclear weapons in strategic doctrines can be reduced.

It was recognition of these points that led to agreement on reducing levels of operational readiness as one of the 13 practical steps towards a nuclear-weapon-free world at the 2000 NPT RevCon.

And that same recognition has, since 2007, led the De-Alerting Group to propose a resolution in the UN General Assembly calling for practical steps to implement this commitment, and to push for strong commitments in this area from this year's NPT RevCon.

The RevCon outcome on operational readiness was not as ambitious as we would have liked, but we nonetheless welcome the commitment by the nuclear-weapon states to "consider the legitimate interest of non-nuclear weapon States in further reducing the operational status of nuclear weapons systems".

Indeed, the Group appreciates the engagement of nuclear weapons states on this issue.

We have no illusions about the challenges and complexities that reducing operational readiness poses for those states, or that achieving this can be a quick or straightforward exercise.

Such moves would clearly require improved levels of transparency and trust between nuclear weapons states, and steps towards a reduction of the centrality of nuclear weapons in their strategic doctrines.

But that's exactly why such steps would be valuable and important, indeed indispensable, in any credible path towards complete and universal nuclear disarmament.

I turn now to my second issue - transparency.

The 13 Practical Steps agreed at the 2000 NPT RevCon also included a call for states to submit regular reports on steps taken to implement their nuclear disarmament obligations under the NPT.

Regular reports of this nature – particularly, although not exclusively, by nuclear weapons states – would further increase transparency, and help build the international confidence required to create a climate that's more conducive to progress on disarmament.

Again to their credit, in recent years, nuclear weapons states have taken a number of such steps.

For example, we welcome the more transparent approach adopted by the US and the UK to their nuclear holdings, and encourage other nuclear weapon states to follow suit.

But there is still plenty of scope for a more standardised approach to reporting and transparency; and New Zealand was pleased to work with Australia at this year's NPT Review Conference to promote specific measures in that regard.

Action Step 21 of the Final Document calls on nuclear weapons states to agree, as soon as possible, on a standard reporting form, and to determine appropriate reporting intervals for the purpose of voluntarily reporting standard information on their nuclear arsenals.

The Foreign Ministers of New Zealand and Australia have since followed up with a joint letter to the UN Secretary General proposing a possible reporting template for implementing this commitment.

Standardised and regular reporting by nuclear weapons states would constitute a practical contribution both to the advancement of nuclear disarmament in general and to generating momentum towards the full implementation of the NPT Action Plan on nuclear disarmament.

It's my hope that progress can be made on agreeing a way of implementing this commitment when the nuclear weapons states meet in Paris in spring of next year to discuss follow-up on the NPT RevCon agreed outcomes.

It bears repeating that any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences; and that the risk of such use remains very real so long as these weapons continue to exist.

New Zealand therefore supports all efforts to bring us closer to a world free of these weapons; and we believe that progress on decreased operational readiness and on increased nuclear transparency represent two practical and achievable contributions towards that ultimate goal.