67th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIRST COMMITTEE

GENERAL STATEMENT

H.E. DELL HIGGIE
AMBASSADOR FOR DISARMAMENT

8 OCTOBER 2012

Check against delivery
Mr Chairman,

You have been my neighbour in Geneva, and your country is our neighbour at home. Disarmament issues are as important for Indonesia as they are for New Zealand. Few others can match your personal expertise on First Committee matters. Accordingly, the New Zealand Delegation is doubly delighted to have you preside over us and to have the opportunity to work with you again.

We look forward to engaging with you as New Zealand again promotes, with likeminded colleagues, a number of resolutions of key significance to us. These include the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; nuclear weapon-free zones in the Southern Hemisphere; the reduced operational readiness of nuclear weapons; as well as nuclear disarmament - this latter in concert with the New Agenda Coalition. New Zealand is pleased to associate itself with the statement delivered already by Sweden on behalf of the Coalition.

This year’s session of the First Committee has particular importance on several counts.

**Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)**

In a statement delivered last month Secretary-General Ban referred to the “growing recognition that the protection of civilians must be paramount”. Those unfamiliar with traditional disarmament and arms control approaches might perhaps view this as a statement of the obvious. In fact at some times, and in some contexts, what we might term the humanitarian dimension to disarmament has been anything but uppermost.

For New Zealand the human, and humanitarian, dimension of security processes must be paramount. This underlies our strong support for an Arms Trade Treaty. Even if this Treaty cannot immediately be a game-changer in the lives of ordinary citizens in dangerous areas of the globe it will inevitably, over time, contribute significantly to their increased protection.

Like others, New Zealand was disappointed that the July Diplomatic Conference was unable to reach agreement on an appropriately robust and comprehensive ATT. We commend Ambassador Roberto Garcia Moritan for his tireless efforts and recognise the good progress achieved under his wise stewardship.

Further work is necessary to strengthen the text which was on the table at the end of the July Conference so that we can be more confident that it will prevent irresponsible arms transfers and forestall their diversion to the illicit trade. It is not just our civilian populations who stand to gain from this: the safety, for instance, of military forces engaged in peacekeeping around the globe would also be better assured.

New Zealand remains wholly committed to adopting an Arms Trade Treaty that meets our humanitarian ambitions.
Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)

I believe that the international disarmament community can draw some satisfaction from the consensual outcome of the recent Small Arms and Light Weapons Review Conference. New Zealand pays special tribute to Ambassador Joy Ogwu of Nigeria for the prudence and skill with which she and her team secured this result.

New Zealand was pleased that the Review Conference was able to agree on a range of practical steps for strengthening implementation of the SALW Programme of Action over the coming years. The clear schedule of meetings for the period ahead will provide the opportunity to continue August’s good discussions on core issues such as technological developments, border controls and stockpile management. The challenge in front of us now will be to translate the Review Conference’s outcome into practical and effective measures that deliver a humanitarian dividend.

Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM)

The Cluster Munitions Convention is well known as a disarmament Treaty which was predicated entirely on humanitarian considerations. The Third Meeting of States Parties took place very recently in Oslo at a point when 75 countries have already become party to it.

Although the CCM was negotiated outside traditional channels and is not yet universal, the use of cluster munitions is now seriously constrained. Those countries that have dared to use them since the Convention’s adoption have met with widespread opprobrium. The Convention has indeed contributed greatly to the global stigmatisation of cluster munitions. Accordingly, New Zealand believes that the Convention is having the humanitarian and normative impact sought by the architects of the Oslo process.

Pursuant to our position as the CCM’s Co-ordinator for National Implementation, New Zealand is closely involved in efforts to assist with the development of implementing legislation for the Convention. We stand ready to assist any state on this - whether through the model implementing legislation we have developed, or via other national precedents. We look forward to carrying this issue forward, as well as that of the Convention’s universalization, at the Fourth Meeting of States Parties which is to be hosted by Zambia in Lusaka next September.

Disarmament Machinery

This year’s report card on the Conference on Disarmament – established as the international community’s mechanism for multilateral disarmament negotiations – could once again, at its most euphemistic, be termed “patchy”. Despite what seemed like a promising effort by Egypt as its President early in the year, the CD has again drawn another blank – now, for its fourteenth year in succession.

We are close to losing patience. The fact is, as you have cause to know only too well, Mr Chairman, that the Conference is deeply mired in a rut of its own making. For as long as
agreement on a mandate for one core issue is held hostage to agreement on mandates for each of the three other core issues, the CD will be unable to get its wheel out of the rut.

At the least, the Conference needs to take careful notice of the recent reminder of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs that the achievement of major disarmament objectives “will require parallel efforts on several tracks, rather than sequential efforts leaving nuclear disarmament as the last to be achieved”.

**Nuclear Disarmament**

Mr Chairman, why is it that, in a world in which no leader to our knowledge has publicly opposed the elimination of nuclear weapons, the obligation in Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament remains unfulfilled? Article VI has been on our books, and in force, for over 40 years now.

It cannot be enough to say that the CD is not able to work. But nor should we resign ourselves to the CD not working. Where an obstacle blocks our path, if it cannot be removed, it is necessary to detour around it. (And the Secretary-General recently pointed to the possibility of removing the obstacle or at least making it surmountable by highlighting several areas where collective and harmonised action could help break the impasse.)

The Secretary-General went on to describe nuclear weapons as irrelevant to today’s threats to international peace and security, drawing attention at the same time to various risks including accidents and potential health and environmental effects.

In this regard, I draw particular attention to the De-alerting Group’s resolution on lowering the operational readiness of nuclear weapons, and also to New Zealand’s participation in collective statements on the humanitarian impact of any use of a nuclear weapon (accidental or otherwise).

My Delegation remains encouraged by the explicit recognition at the 2010 NPT Review Conference that the consequences of any such use would indeed be catastrophic and by its reaffirmation of the full applicability of International Humanitarian Law to all aspects of nuclear weapons. We very much welcome the opportunity provided by the meeting being hosted next March by Norway to consider in full the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. Again, this is an instance of the increasing focus, which I referred to at the outset of this statement, on the humanitarian implications and human consequences of states’ security policies and weapons.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.