Negative Security Assurances  
CD Plenary: 10 March 2011  
Statement by the New Zealand Delegation

My delegation welcomes the opportunity to contribute its views on negative security assurances once again. Indeed, we were encouraged by the level of debate here on this issue on 10 February.

We would like to think that recent evolutions in the policies of key members might help breathe new life into our engagement on NSAs – itself a long-standing item on the CD’s agenda. But the challenge, of course, is how to harness this development.

The sole work programme to have achieved consensus in this body since 1998 – CD/1864 - accords a negotiating mandate only to fissile materials. This approach was echoed in CD/1889, and indeed it reflects the priorities of the vast majority of delegations here, including my own.

Mr President, when the UN Secretary-General addressed us here in January, he suggested that increased engagement - such as via an informal process - could help engender greater knowledge and trust on our part which we could then build upon at the time when the CD might begin its formal work. In that spirit, I would like to make several observations on NSAs against the time when this body is able to carry out the activities for which it was established, namely negotiations.

As I noted during our debate on this topic last month, New Zealand has long supported the notion, embodied in the outcome of the NPT Review Conference in 2000 and referenced also in the 2010 Action Plan, that legally-binding security assurances would strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. It remains very high on our list of priorities.

Given the commitment of the nuclear-weapon states to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to the elimination of nuclear weapons, we continue to view entering into legally-binding security assurances as a comparatively quick and effective way by which those states can bring about a significant improvement in the international security environment.

Mr President, I have just alluded to the nuclear weapon states that are party to the NPT, but I would like now to widen that reference. When I spoke on this topic last month, I recalled my delegation’s sensitivity to the risk that dealing with NSAs in the context of the CD might potentially blur the distinction between NPT nuclear-weapon states, on the one hand, and those nuclear weapon-possessing states which are not party to that Treaty, on the other.
That said, I listened very carefully to, and was intrigued by, the remarks Ireland made during that same debate on 10 February – and you yourself have just referenced those comments in your introduction to this morning’s debate, Mr President.

The distinguished Ambassador of Ireland expressed the view that it was perfectly possible to conceive of a treaty on negative security assurances negotiated in the CD whose terms did not condone the possession of nuclear arsenals by states who have not joined the NPT. Ireland explained that such a treaty could take the form of a general prohibition on the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states party to the NPT.

Such a treaty would be opened for universal adherence. As Ireland pointed out, it would not add to the existing obligations of the non-nuclear weapon members of the NPT. Nor would it confer, a priori, any particular status on any other state.

Rather, its parties, motivated by the desire to genuinely advance global security, would be obligating themselves - irrespective of their own status vis-à-vis the NPT - not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon NPT parties.

It seems to my delegation that this thoughtful suggestion indeed offers the prospect of our being able to step around what has seemed for some time to be a roadblock on this issue and I would certainly welcome hearing the views of others on it during the course of our discussions here.

In the meantime, New Zealand will continue to call upon the nuclear-weapon states to respect fully their existing commitments with regard to security assurances pending the conclusion of multilaterally negotiated, legally-binding, ones.

I should like to end now on a broader note: one relating to the question of our Programme of Work. I know, Mr President, that you and indeed your Canadian predecessor have worked assiduously on all our behalf on this issue. My fear, however, is that notwithstanding all your efforts (and those that may well follow from your successors) the work programme of the Conference will remain blocked – so that like Cassandra we will still be wringing our hands over a dead Caesar many months from now.

My delegation was especially struck by the clarity with which United States Secretary of State Clinton deplored the current situation in this body during her statement here last week. She said then:

“No nation has to agree to the treaty” [she was referring, of course, to a treaty on fissile materials - but the point is the same with regard to any product emanating from this body]. “But it is unacceptable for any nation to prevent other nations from pursuing what such a treaty could look like and what benefits it could provide the world.”
Unless, Mr President, we are able to move forward on the negotiation of a fissile material treaty and begin substantive work on the other topics on our agenda – including, of course, NSAs - the mantra of this Conference as the “single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum” will continue to sound like a work of fiction.

Thank you, Mr. President.