

De-alerting group General Debate Statement - 2010 Review Conference of the Parities to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 3-28 May 2010

Statement by Hon Georgina te Heuheu, Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control, 4 May 2010 on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria, Switzerland and New Zealand

Mr President,

I take the floor on behalf of Chile, Malaysia, Nigeria, Switzerland and my own country, New Zealand, on the issue of decreasing the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems.

Since 2007 our countries have called for action to address the significant numbers of nuclear weapons that still exist today at high levels of readiness. Our countries believe there is an urgent need for action to address this situation.

It remains of deep and abiding concern to us that twenty years after the end of the Cold War, doctrinal aspects from that era – such as high alert levels – are perpetuated today. While there have been marked improvements in the international security climate since the end of the Cold War, commensurate decreases in the alert levels of nuclear weapons have not been forthcoming.

We share wholeheartedly the sentiment expressed by US President Obama in Prague last year of the need to put an end to Cold War thinking. This Conference has an unprecedented opportunity to achieve progress in this regard.

Certainly, we welcome recent reductions in the numbers of nuclear weapons. What would also be welcome would be increased recognition that high levels of alert of those nuclear weapons that remain are disproportionate to the current strategic situation. We are naturally disappointed that recent reviews of nuclear doctrine have not resulted in lowered levels of alert. We are encouraged, however, that the door has been left open for further work in this area.

A lowered operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems would represent an important interim step towards the vision of a nuclear-weapon free world. It would demonstrate a palpable commitment to a diminishing role for nuclear weapons. In addition, steps to lengthen the decision-making “fuse” for the launch of any nuclear attack would minimise the risk of unintended use or use in error.

These benefits were recognised by all States parties at the 2000 Review Conference. Amongst the practical steps adopted by consensus at that meeting, it was agreed that concrete measures to further reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons systems would promote international stability and at the same time serve the cause of nuclear disarmament. Our

countries will be working purposefully for an outcome on operational readiness that builds on the 2000 result. We have submitted working paper NPT/CONF.2010/WP.10 to this end.

Mr President,

As our working paper outlines, action to lower the operational readiness of nuclear weapon systems is consistent with the imperative expressed in the first preambular paragraph of the Treaty to make every effort to avert the danger of nuclear war and to safeguard the security of peoples from the devastation of such conflict.

With this in mind, our countries look forward to working with all delegations towards the achievement of a robust outcome on operational readiness here in New York. You can be assured, Mr President, of our group's wholehearted support as you guide us towards such an outcome.