

PACDAC Meeting Minutes

12:00-13:00, Monday 14 March 2022 (via Zoom)

Members in attendance

Hon Phil Twyford (Chair)
Mary Wareham (Deputy Chair)
Edwina Hughes
Andrew Chen
Kevin Clements
Martin Donoghue
Jamila Homayun
Dylan Maynard
Lucy Stewart

Officials in attendance

Katy Donnelly (MFAT)
Jordan Allison (MFAT)
Mark Talbot (MFAT)
Mike Shaw (Minister's Office) (12:30-13:00)
Will Blackler (Minister's Office)

1. Opening Remarks from the Chair, Hon Phil Twyford

The Chair, Hon Phil Twyford, commenced the extraordinary session with introductory remarks on New Zealand's response to the conflict in Ukraine, including the action taken to date in disarmament and non-proliferation international fora. The Minister then posed some questions on what further action New Zealand should take in response to the conflict before opening the floor for discussion.

2. Open Discussion

Prior to the session, Mary and Andrew circulated background information on various weapons of concern deployed to Ukraine and potential action points for New Zealand to consider in response. Edwina commenced the session with a reference to this information, noting that Peace Movement Aotearoa supported the advice provided by Mary and Andrew.

Edwina shared with the Committee the following list of recommendations that had emerged from her consultation with Peace Movement Aotearoa's members and supporters:

1. New Zealand should call for an immediate ceasefire;
2. New Zealand should provide humanitarian assistance both to Ukraine and any neighbouring states taking in Ukrainian refugees;
3. New Zealand should take in more Ukrainian refugees, more widely than those with family members here if required, and urge other states to do the same;

4. Take into account the disproportionate impact conflict has on women and girls, and integrate that into the humanitarian response and refugee resettlement programme;
5. Support the IAEA as necessary in its efforts to secure Ukraine's reactors;
6. Counteract the media and political discourse that implies Russia is the only state that has ever used certain weapons or invaded other nations;
7. Ensure that the Ukraine crisis is not used as a justification for an increase in military spending in budget 2022;
8. Continue and increase disarmament efforts at the international level;
9. Continue efforts to remove the veto power from the P5;
10. Work with the international community to hold Russia to account for its various crimes;
11. Ensure that New Zealand does not become involved in reprehensible behaviour such as this in future, as it has done in the past; and
12. Acknowledge concern about the impact of economic sanctions on ordinary Russian families and their communities.

Marty focused on the emergency response on the ground in Ukraine, including both the immediate UN response as well as planning for the aftermath of the conflict. He suggested that New Zealand identify resources that could be earmarked for the UN or NGOs working in Ukraine, including the immediate funding of a rapid assessment of the humanitarian need in Ukraine to help target resources.

Mary noted the importance of New Zealand continuing to issue statements on the situation in Ukraine across the range of international bodies, including on specific disarmament issues. She encouraged further condemnation of the use of cluster munitions in Ukraine. Mary noted that the conflict provided an opportunity for New Zealand to assess its participation in all of the disarmament and non-proliferation bodies with a view to prioritising engagement in fora that were providing a more effective avenue for New Zealand to pursue its objectives.

Kevin agreed that current efforts should be focused on alleviating the immediate suffering of the Ukrainian people. He shared a range of views on the issues that would need to be worked through in the medium to longer term, including the relationship between Russia and NATO, plans for responding to a potentially long-term insurgency in Ukraine, and a strategy for maintaining communication with Russia and for ensuring that sanctions remained relevant and appropriate depending on Russia's behaviour.

Andrew drew attention to the fact that a number of countries were still dealing with COVID as their first priority, which would inhibit their ability to engage substantively on the Ukraine conflict. He also suggested that New Zealand look for likeminded countries that we could form coalitions with, rather than looking to achieve broad consensus in international bodies that faced the risk of gridlock.

Jamila suggested that New Zealand look to channel its humanitarian support into countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, particularly since past experiences have demonstrated that support for refugees in those countries would likely wane over time. New Zealand should also look to amplify the voices of both survivors of attacks in Ukraine and of Russians opposing the war.

Lucy commented that New Zealand's response to date had been appropriate, and encouraged New Zealand to continue to call out every violation of international law and maintain our public stance of disapproval. It was also important to consider that funding for disarmament had been on the wane and advocated that New Zealand rally others in order to reinvigorate disarmament initiatives and ensure disarmament remained on the international agenda. She also suggested New Zealand consider track 2 diplomacy as a way of moving to a cessation of hostilities.

Dylan said it was more important than ever that we continued to push hard to uphold disarmament and non-proliferation norms, and support disarmament initiatives, especially progressive ones like the TPNW. The war could provide an opportunity to re-galvanise support for international disarmament efforts.

Kevin noted that Russia had endorsed the P5 statement that a nuclear war could not be won so must never be fought, but that the question needed to be asked whether Russia still shared that aspiration. He also shared views regarding the recruitment of Syrian mercenaries by Russia, and the role that could be played by China in achieving a ceasefire and a resolution to the conflict.

Edwina made the point that New Zealand's humanitarian assistance to Ukraine should not come at the expense of other situations that require our assistance. She also noted the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe had useful step-by-step proposals for reducing the risk of armed conflict in Europe and it might be worth looking at those, which New Zealand could factor into its response.

Andrew said we needed to further emphasise the distinction between the Russian people and its government in our domestic discourse.

In summarising the discussion, the Minister began by noting the importance of continuing to speak out in response to violations of international humanitarian law, such as the use of cluster munitions or incendiary weapons. Humanitarian support would also continue. When appropriate, thought could also be given to the medium and longer-term implications of the conflict for the international system. In closing, the Minister noted that the meeting had seen an interesting exchange of views and thanked the Committee for their engagement.