

Statement by the Delegation of New Zealand

Thank you, Mr President.

In taking the floor my delegation would like to congratulate you on your appointment to your high office, and to assure you of our support as you guide this General Conference in its work.

At last year's General Conference my delegation commented that the immediate past had seen very mixed results with respect to nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. But we stressed that New Zealand retained a sense of optimism about the will of the international community to take the steps that would enhance security for peoples everywhere as we entered a new millennium. That optimism was not misplaced.

The outcome of the recent Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference exceeded expectations. The States parties to the 187-member Treaty were able to reach a consensus that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan greeted as marking 'a significant step forward in humanity's pursuit of a more peaceful world'.

Particularly welcome to New Zealand, which holds unswervingly to the view that nuclear weapons must be eliminated was the new and unequivocal political undertaking given by the five nuclear weapon States 'to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals'. But the other practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Treaty on nuclear disarmament were also of great significance. These ranged from the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test- Ban Treaty to the further development of the verification capabilities that will be required for the achievement and maintenance of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Mr. President, the outcomes of the NPT Review Conference are of real importance to us as members of the Agency. Over 50 paragraphs refer directly to the JABA, and others do so implicitly. We have every cause to be pleased about the vote of confidence shown in the IAEA and its role in implementing the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

However, as demanding as reaching a consensus outcome to the Review Conference was, the real challenge is now before us. This is no time for complacency. We have to seize the moment of the historic agreement amongst 187 States and implement the undertakings given by each and every one of us. These hard-reached compromise agreements were not an end in themselves; the expeditious implementation of them is the imperative.

There is much to be done, and the time is of the essence. It is time for the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to establish a subsidiary body to deal with nuclear disarmament; to resume negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices; and to deal with outer space issues. The CTBT, to which we dedicated so many years of negotiations, is still to enter into force. We need to roll back the proliferation of nuclear weapons and meet the on-going challenge to the non-proliferation regime.

Mr. President, within our own house, there is much to be done. Some of us have yet to fulfil our NPT obligations by concluding safeguards agreements with the Agency. We again have to express regret about the slow growth in adherence to the strengthened safeguards system.

Certainly we can take reassurance from the findings of the secretariat that, for States with safeguards agreements in force, the Agency did not find any indication of diversion or misuse of nuclear materials, facilities or equipment placed under safeguards in 1999.

Furthermore, for two States with both a comprehensive safeguards agreement and an Additional Protocol in place, the Agency was able to draw a conclusion relating to the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in the State as a whole. But it is regrettable that adherence to the strengthened safeguards system, which can provide such comprehensive assurances, is proceeding so slowly. With only some fifteen Additional Protocols in force by last count, universal adherence will require more determined effort.

Mr. President, New Zealand applauds the welcome developments on the Korean Peninsula. But we regret having to refer again to the continuing lack of progress on safeguards implementation issues in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This Conference must again call on the DPRK to co-operate with the Agency in coming into full compliance with its safeguards agreement, which remains binding and in force.

Since December 1998 the Agency has not been in a position to implement its mandate in Iraq under the relevant Security Council resolutions and there is thus no assurance of Iraq's compliance with those resolutions. The Agency's visit, in January, pursuant to Iraq's Safeguards Agreement, is welcome, but it is not a substitute. This means that the General Conference will need to address the situation in Iraq again.

Mr. President, for New Zealanders with our abhorrence of nuclear weapons, it is the Agency's essential contribution to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, especially through its verification activities, that ranks it as such a significant international organization. But its work in promoting a global nuclear safety culture is also hugely important. Our concern about effects on humanity and on our environment of nuclear-related accidents runs deep. We thus support strongly the Agency's work to strengthen international co-operation in nuclear, radiation and waste safety and the assistance it is able to provide in the event of accidents.

New Zealand itself is a nuclear free zone. The South Pacific is a nuclear weapon free zone. We have done everything we can to minimise the risks of nuclear-related accidents in our own country and region. But we remain vulnerable due to the maritime transportation of radioactive materials. New Zealand is on one of three routes along which pass shipments of nuclear materials being returned to Japan following reprocessing in Europe. The shipments are scheduled for about the next ten years, with an expected frequency of one or two shipments per year. There are strong concerns in New Zealand regarding the risk of an accident and the impact on coastal states' environmental and economic interests. Although we acknowledge this risk is small, the impact environmentally and economically could be very substantial.

This is a feeling shared widely in the region. The leaders of the South Pacific Forum governments have repeatedly expressed their concerns about shipments of radioactive materials and mixed oxide fuel. We have an active dialogue with the States responsible for the shipments, which we value, and have made some progress in securing prior notification of shipments and agreement to regional talks on liability issues. But we are not the only State or region with interests in this aspect of nuclear safety. We therefore believe that bilateral and regional efforts to address the issues would be strengthened if there were agreement at the international level - in the IAEA General Conference context - to a realistic but progressive

agenda for improving the measures and mechanisms relevant to the international maritime transport of radioactive material and spent fuel.

New Zealand has sponsored a resolution at this year's General Conference that seeks to address these concerns in a balanced way. It builds on previous consensus resolutions, and on recent agreement at the NPT Review Conference.

The resolution promotes the universal application of the highest safety standards in the transport of radioactive materials. It seeks greater transparency in relation to the standards adopted at the national level and for international transport. It encourages States shipping radioactive materials to notify and consult with potentially affected coastal and other States prior to shipment. And it calls for efforts to improve measures and mechanisms relating to the international maritime transport of radioactive materials, taking account of the importance of having effective liability mechanisms in place to address the risk of harm or economic loss. Recognition of the balance of rights and responsibilities and coastal states, soundly based in existing international law, is also sought.

New Zealand wants to work with Conference participants to secure the widest possible support for this updated resolution on the safety of transport of radioactive material. We very much hope that there is amongst us here sufficient flexibility and understanding of the concerns of so many States, some of them small and a highly dependent on fragile marine environments for their very existence, to ensure a successful outcome.

Mr. President, the NPT Review Conference gave the Director General and his team a resounding vote of confidence. The Agency is fulfilling its mandate fully and professionally. But any international organisation is only as strong as its member States are dedicated. The responsibility lies with the member States to ensure that the Director General has the resources and the support to meet the high expectations that the international community has placed in the Agency. New Zealand will continue to play its part in helping the Agency to meet its important responsibilities.