Statement by H.E. Dell Higie,
Ambassador for Disarmament of New Zealand

8 October 2014
It is a pleasure to see you, Ambassador Rattray, a representative from a part of the world with which New Zealand and our region of the Pacific has so much in common, leading the work of the First Committee. My Delegation particularly welcomes your determination to encourage engagement and interactivity within the Committee and to use the Committee's meetings to advance our disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation agenda.

I am confident that you would agree, Mr Chair, that - just like the curate’s egg - some parts of our First Committee agenda are in good shape and progressing well. I note most especially that two weeks ago, on the 25th of September, we witnessed here at the UN a real success story: the surpassing of the 50-state threshold which triggers the timeline for the Arms Trade Treaty's entry-into-force. That this has happened so very quickly (not that much more than a year after the ATT was first opened for signature) says a lot about our UN membership’s collective determination to regulate the international trade in conventional arms and about the significance of the prohibitions and risk assessment process which this Treaty establishes.

For our own part, New Zealand is proud now to have joined the community of ATT members: we deposited our Instrument of Ratification early last month and are provisionally applying Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty pending its entry into force on the 24th of December this year.

Implementation of the Treaty will be key to reaping the human security and development outcomes which we and so many others expect to flow from this Treaty. For some considerable time now, in partnership with the Small Arms Survey and as our own contribution toward promoting the ATT’s implementation in our region, New Zealand has been working closely with Pacific countries on the drafting of Model Legislation to assist with the translation of the Treaty’s commitments into domestic frameworks.

Development of an ATT Model Law has proved to be quite a challenging task and we have been working on it for well over a year now. However, I am delighted to be able to announce today that our Model has been completed and is now available both in hard and e-copy format - some hard copies are indeed available at the back of the room here today.

I should also note, Mr Chair, that New Zealand is keen to contribute to the important efforts currently under way, under the leadership of Mexico, to frame the institutional arrangements and procedural rules that will guide the Treaty going forward. We congratulate Mexico on its successful hosting last month of the first round of consultations in the ATT’s Preparatory Process and we look forward to the second round to be convened next month by Germany.

We can all be heartened, I believe Mr Chairman, by the success story which is the Arms Trade Treaty. It was mandated and negotiated here at the UN, watched over by the First Committee and adopted by the General Assembly. Thanks to the ongoing support and attentive eye of civil society, we know it will continue to go from strength to strength.
New Zealand takes much less heart from progress with regard to another key item on our First Committee agenda – nuclear disarmament. This remains an issue of prime importance to my country – and indeed to the vast majority of UN members – yet, as we look out to next year’s Review of the operation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it remains difficult for us to see meaningful movement forward.

It is true that not all Member States of the UN base their approaches to nuclear weapons issues on the NPT. But for the overwhelming majority of us who do so, and who steadfastly support this Treaty as the cornerstone of our disarmament and non-proliferation policies, there remains unfinished business. The NPT was never about creating a permanent right for some to retain nuclear weapons. Article VI of the Treaty promised that, at some point beyond the Treaty’s adoption in 1968, “effective measures” would be put in place leading to nuclear disarmament.

The actual point at which those measures would be put in place – or indeed the point at which the multilateral process for putting those measures in place would begin - was not specified in the Treaty. But after considerably more than four decades since the Treaty entered into force, non-nuclear weapon states certainly have a right to ask – if not now, when?

The New Agenda Coalition (which, together with New Zealand, comprises Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico and South Africa) put forward a paper - WP 18 - to this year’s NPT PrepCom meeting outlining a set of options for the Treaty’s “effective measures.” New Zealand has since sought to move the discussion forward by canvassing some of the international legal issues connected with “effective measures.” (The Discussion Paper exploring these legal issues will be available at the back of the room tomorrow, and will be the subject of a panel side-event with its author here on Friday 10 October.)

Not only would Article VI’s “effective measures” on nuclear disarmament serve to rectify the sense of imbalance in implementation of the NPT but, as our Discussion Paper makes apparent, they can give the Treaty’s existing prohibitions additional normative support.

The renewed focus on implementation of Article VI offers, we believe, the foundation for success at next year’s NPT Review Conference and the revivification of the Treaty’s full credibility. We welcome the range of laudable initiatives which currently assist this outcome - including, of course, the Oslo and Nayarit Conferences on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons. We congratulate Austria on its hosting of a further Conference on this issue in December this year.

The Statement on the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons which New Zealand will deliver in the Committee later this month similarly reinforces the need for human security – rather than states’ war strategies – to be at the core of our deliberations on nuclear weapon issues.
I would not wish to end this statement on the pessimistic note that discussions about nuclear issues often seem to generate. I would therefore like to draw from the optimism of our distinguished High Representative for Disarmament, Angela Kane, whom we were honoured to have visit New Zealand earlier this year. She said, in the first of a series of speeches which she delivered in New Zealand (and which have since been published in UNODA Occasional Paper, No 26), that: “Despite all that is wrong in this world – all the armed conflicts, the arms races, the orgy of military spending, the weapons improvements, the non-implementation of disarmament commitments – despite all of these, I believe that disarmament does have a future. ... Disarmament will survive for two reasons: it works, and it is the right thing to do. It fuses together ... the two forces that make the world go round: self-interest and idealism.”

I am confident that under your guidance this year, Mr Chairman, self-interest and idealism will be able to play their full part in advancing all the items on our Committee’s agenda.