



# **United Nations General Assembly: 10<sup>TH</sup> Plenary Meeting, General Debate (Item 8)**

**New Zealand Statement delivered by  
Prime Minister, Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern**

23 September 2022

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**



**E ngā Mana, e ngā Reo, Rau Rangatira mā kua huihui mai  
nei i tēnei Whare Nui o te Ao**

**Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa, mai i tōku Whenua o  
Aotearoa**

**Tuia ki runga, Tuia ki raro, ka Rongo to pō ka rongo te ao**

**Nō reira, tēnā koutou katoa**

Mr President,  
Mr Secretary-General,  
Friends,

I greet you in te reo Māori, the language of the tangata whenua,  
or first people, of Aotearoa New Zealand.

I acknowledge the leaders who are here, gathered in person after  
a long and difficult period.

And as is tradition, in my country, I also acknowledge those who  
have passed.

Loss brings with it a chance for reflection.

And as leaders, between us we each represent countries and  
communities who have lost much in these past few  
years. Through famine, severe weather, natural disasters and a  
pandemic.

COVID-19 was devastating. It took millions of lives. It continues to impact on our economies and with that, the wellbeing of our people. It set us back in our fight against the crisis of climate change and progress on the Sustainable Development Goals while we looked to the health crisis in front of us.

And while we enter a period now where the crisis is subsiding, the lessons cannot.

COVID schooled us.

It forced us to acknowledge how interconnected, and therefore how reliant we are on one another.

We move between one another's countries with increasing ease. We trade our goods and services. And when one link in our supply chain is impacted, we all are.

The lessons of COVID, are in many ways the same as the lessons of climate change.

When crisis is upon us, we cannot and will not solve these issues on our own.

The next pandemic will not be prevented by one country's efforts, but by all of ours. Climate action will only ever be as successful as the least committed country, as they pull down the ambition of the collective.

I am not suggesting though that we rely on the goodwill of others to make progress. We need a dual strategy. One where we push for collective effort, but we also use our multilateral tools to make progress.

That's why on pandemic preparedness we support efforts to develop a new global health legal instrument, strengthened international health regulations and a strong and empowered World Health Organisation.

It's why we are such advocates of the World Trade Organisation and its reform to ensure supply chains remain open and critical goods and services are not subjected to protectionism in times of need.

It's why we have worked so hard within the Paris Agreement to see the action we need on climate, while also doing our bit at home including putting a 1.5 degree warming limit into law, increasing our NDC to 50% below 2005 levels by 2030, and quadrupling our climate finance commitment.

Whether it's climate, trade, health crisis or seeking peaceful solutions to war and conflict - New Zealand has always been a believer in multilateral tools.

We were amongst the founding members of the United Nations as governments of the day recognised that the perils of war would only be avoided through a greater sense of shared responsibility.

The basis on which this institution was formed, remains as relevant today as it was then.

But without reform, we risk irrelevancy.

There is perhaps no greater example of this than Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Let us all be clear Russia's war is illegal.

It is immoral.

It is a direct attack on the UN Charter and the international rules-based system and everything that this community should stand for.

Putin's suggestion that it could at any point deploy further weapons that it has at their disposal reveals the false narrative that they have based their invasion on. What country who claims to be a liberator, threatens to annihilate the very civilians they claim to liberate?

This war is based on a lie.

But I recognise, that for the people of Ukraine who have lost loved ones, their sense of peace and security, their livelihoods - these are all just words. They need us, as a global community to ask one simple question.

What if it was us?

Our ability to answer that question with any confidence that we have the tools as a global community to act swiftly and collectively has been severely undermined.

In March when we most needed the UN Security Council to act in the defence of international peace and security, it could not. It did not fulfil its mandate because of one permanent member who was willing to abuse its privileged position.

That was wrong.

We will not give up on the ability of our multilateral institutions to stand up against this illegal war, or to take on the many challenges we face.

These institutions are the ballast we need, but it's a ballast that requires modernisation, fit for the tumultuous waters we all face.

That is why New Zealand was pleased to champion the Veto Initiative. Not only does it provide an opportunity to scrutinise the actions of the permanent member who cast a veto, the Veto Initiative gives the whole UN membership a voice where the Security Council has been unable to act.

But we continue to call for more than that.

For the United Nations to maintain its relevancy, and ensure that it truly is the voice of the breadth of countries it represents, the veto must be abolished and Permanent Members must exercise their responsibility for the benefit of international peace and security, rather than the pursuit of national interest.

There are other battles that we continue to wage as a nation, including our call for a global response to the use of nuclear weapons.

Our history of championing not just non-proliferation, but a prohibition on nuclear weapons is grounded in what we have witnessed, but also what we have experienced.

We are a nation that is both of the Pacific, and within it. It was in our region that these weapons of war were tested. Those tests have left a mark on the people, lands and waters of our home.

The only way to guarantee our people that they will be safe from the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, is for them not to exist.

That's why Aotearoa New Zealand calls on all states that share this conviction to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Some will call such a position naive.

Some believe that we are safer as a result of nuclear weapons. In New Zealand, we have never accepted the wisdom of mutually assured destruction.

It takes one country to believe that their cause is nobler, their might stronger, their people more willing to be sacrificed. None of us can stand on this platform and turn a blind eye to the fact that there are already leaders amongst us who believe this.

Nuclear weapons do not make us safer.

There will be those who agree but believe it is simply too hard to rid ourselves of nuclear weapons at this juncture. There is no question that nuclear disarmament is an enormous challenge. But if given the choice, and we are being given a choice, surely we would choose the challenge of disarmament than the consequences of a failed strategy of weapons-based deterrence.



And this is why we will continue to advocate for meaningful progress on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Progress and consensus that was recently blocked by Russia - and represented a backwards step to the efforts of nearly every country in the world to make some even limited progress on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

None of this will stop New Zealand's advocacy.

We will remain a strong and passionate advocate for efforts to address the weapons of old, but also, the weapons that are new.

After all, the face of war has changed.

And with that, the weapons used.

The tools used to challenge the statehood of others are hidden and more complex.

Traditional combat, espionage, and the threat of nuclear weapons are now accompanied by cyber-attacks, prolific disinformation, and manipulation of whole communities and societies.

As leaders, we have never treated the weapons of old in the same way as those that have emerged. And that's understandable. After all, a bullet takes a life. A bomb takes out a whole village.

A lie online or from a podium does not.

But what if that lie, told repeatedly, and across many platforms, prompts, inspires, or motivates others to take up arms. To threaten the security of others. To turn a blind eye to atrocities, or worse, to become complicit in them. What then?

This is no longer a hypothetical. The weapons of war have changed, they are upon us and require the same level of action and activity that we put into the weapons of old.

We recognised the threats that the old weapons created. We came together as communities to minimise these threats. We created international rules, norms and expectations. We never saw that as a threat to our individual liberties - rather, it was a preservation of them.

The same must apply now as we take on these new challenges.

In New Zealand, we deeply value our right to protest. Some of our major social progress has been brought about by hikoi or people power - becoming the first country in the world to recognise women's right to vote, movement on major indigenous and human rights issues to name but a few.

Upholding these values in a modern environment translates into protecting a free, secure and open internet. To realise all of the opportunities that it presents in the way we communicate, organise and gather.

But that does not mean the absence of transparency, expectations or even rules. If we correctly identify what it is we are trying to prevent.

And surely we can start with violent extremism and terrorist content online.

On the 15th of March 2019 New Zealand experienced a horrific terrorist attack on its Muslim community. More than 50 people were killed as they prayed. The attack was live-streamed on a popular social media platform in an effort to gain notoriety, and to spread hate.

At that time, the ability to thwart those goals was limited. And the chances of government alone being able to resolve this gap was equally challenging. That's why, alongside President Emmanuel Macron we created the Christchurch Call to Action.

The Call Community has worked together to address terrorism and violent extremist content online. As this important work progresses, we have demonstrated the impact we can have by working together collaboratively.

We've improved crisis reactions, stymieing the ability to live stream attacks, we have crisis protocols that kick in to prevent proliferation.

We are also focused on prevention – understanding the interactions between online environment and the real world that can lead to radicalisation.

This week we launched an initiative alongside companies and non-profits to help improve research and understanding of how a person's online experiences are curated by automated processes.

This will also be important in understanding more about mis and disinformation online. A challenge that we must as leaders address.

Sadly, I think it's easy to dismiss this problem as one in the margins. I can certainly understand the desire to leave it to someone else. As leaders, we are rightly concerned that even those most light-touch approaches to disinformation could be misinterpreted as being hostile to the values of free speech we value so highly.

But while I cannot tell you today what the answer is to this challenge, I can say with complete certainty that we cannot ignore it. To do so poses an equal threat to the norms we all value.

After-all, how do you successfully end a war if people are led to believe the reason for its existence is not only legal but noble?

How do you tackle climate change if people do not believe it exists?

How do you ensure the human rights of others are upheld, when they are subjected to hateful and dangerous rhetoric and ideology?

The weapons may be different, but the goals of those who perpetuate them is often the same. To cause chaos and reduce the ability of others to defend themselves. To disband communities. To collapse the collective strength of countries who work together.

But we have an opportunity here to ensure that these particular weapons of war do not become an established part of warfare.

And so, we once again come back to the primary tool we have. Diplomacy, dialogue, working together on solutions that do not undermine human rights, but enhance them.

For those who have not sought out the Christchurch Call to Action, I ask that you consider it. As with so many of the challenges we face, we will only be as strong as those who do the least.

In these times, I am acutely aware of how easy it is to feel disheartened. We are facing many battles on many fronts.

But there is cause for optimism.

Because for every new weapon we face, there is a new tool to overcome it.

For every attempt to push the world into chaos, is a collective conviction to bring us back to order.

We have the means; we just need the collective will.

**Mai i tōku (u-kai-po) Aotearoa, karahuihui mai tātou, nō reira, tēnā tātou kātoa.**

No Reira, tena kotou, tena kotou tena tatou katoa