

Statement by Mr. D.B. Venkatesh Varma, Director, Disarmament and International Security, Ministry of External Affairs, to introduce the resolution Entitled "Reducing Nuclear Danger" on October 27, 2003

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to introduce the Resolution entitled "Reducing Nuclear Danger" under Agenda item No.74(x) contained in document No. A/C.158/L.34 and co-sponsored by Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cuba, Haiti, Jordan, Kenya, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Namibia, Naru, Solomon Islands, Sudan, Zambia and India.

Mr. Chairman, The cold war ended more than a decade ago. With its passing we had hoped that nuclear doctrines, stressing hair-trigger alert of nuclear weapons and their associated nuclear postures would also pass into history. Unfortunately, that legacy and its consequent nuclear dangers are still with us today.

With the end of cold war there exists no justification for thousands of nuclear weapons to be maintained in a state of hair-trigger alert. The state of hair-trigger alert poses the risk of accidental and unintentional launch in response to a false warning or communication errors and the danger of their falling into the wrong hands. We have the responsibility to prevent disastrous and irreversible consequences of such a dangerous eventuality.

India first introduced the resolution 'Reducing the nuclear danger' in 1998. The resolution has received, every year, wide support of the General Assembly. It makes a modest and practical proposal for a review of nuclear doctrines and immediate steps to reduce the risk of unintentional or accidental use of Nuclear weapons.

In March 2000, the Secretary General, in his report to the Millennium Assembly, proposed the convening of a major international conference that would help to identify ways of eliminating nuclear danger in order to help focus

attention on the risks posed by the hair-trigger alert of thousands of deployed nuclear weapons. The consensus declaration adopted at the UN Millennium Summit on September 8, 2000 had resolved to convene an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers. The very real danger posed by recent developments and the increased threat of weapons, components etc. becoming accessible to non-state actors have made the current global security scenario even more precarious.

The Report of the Secretary General (A/58/162) submitted in July 2003 in pursuance of the Resolution 57/84 has noted that the Secretary General will continue to encourage Member States to endeavor to create conditions that would allow the emergence of an international consensus to hold an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear danger.

The 2001 Report of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (A/56/400) had made seven recommendations that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war. Mr. Chairman, in view of their importance, the recommendations bear reiteration.

- a) Promotion of a wide-ranging international dialogue on cooperative security;*
- b) Preliminary political and technical measures in preparation for the possibility of convening, at the appropriate time, a major international conference that would help to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers;*
- c) De-alerting of nuclear weapons;*
- d) Review of nuclear doctrines;*
- e) Further reduction of tactical nuclear weapons as an integral part of the nuclear arms reduction and disarmament process;*
- f) Enhancement of security at a global and a regional level by promoting increased transparency of all nuclear weapons programmes;*
- g) Creation of a climate for implementing nuclear disarmament measures. Programmes of education and training on the dangers of nuclear weapons to foster an informed world public opinion that would be able to exercise a positive influence on the political will to eliminate nuclear weapons.*

Some nuclear weapon states have voiced apprehensions about the complicated nature of technicalities involved. However, India believes that these technical issues can be overcome if there is a political commitment to take interim steps to reduce the danger that the state of hair trigger alert of nuclear weapons poses. This could be interim but important step in the process to negotiate a non-discriminatory and multilaterally verifiable treaty for complete elimination of nuclear weapons, which would, of course take a long time and

involve difficult negotiations, taking into account the complex technical aspects involved. But that should not deter us from taking interim steps to reduce the danger that these nuclear weapons pose-especially now that the global security scenario includes the grave threat from terrorist organizations.

The recommendations contained in the Resolution are pragmatic and feasible. The Resolution aims to reaffirm the desire of the international community to ensure the safety and the security of the mankind from the dangers of accidental launch, false alarms and from deployment of nuclear weapons at hair-trigger alert. It is simple and unencumbered by any reference to issues that may be contentious.

Mr. Chairman, as has been stated before, support for reducing alert status have come from various distinguished quarters. In 1996, the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of nuclear weapons identified that the first step would be to take nuclear forces "off-alert". A special statement was made by the Pugwash Foundation in this regard. Non-Governmental organisations, environmentalists, scientists, lawyers and physicians have joined in making a call for removing the hair trigger alert of nuclear forces. The Tokyo Forum Report of 1999 recognised the importance of moving in the direction of reducing the alert status of nuclear forces.

The Resolution, proposes to request the Secretary General to intensify efforts and support initiatives that would contribute towards the full implementation of these recommendations and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its 59th Session.

Mr. Chairman, Indian delegation, along with all the delegations that have co-sponsored this resolution, expresses its sincere hope that it will receive the widest possible support in this Committee. A positive vote for this Resolution will be a reaffirmation of the will and determination of the international community to take decisive steps towards reducing nuclear danger.

Thank you.

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