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Nuclear Disarmament

Statement by
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I wish, first of all, to fully endorse the statement made by the distinguished Representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union. I also wish to refer to Ambassador Sander's statement during our general debate in which he indicated (on behalf of the EU) that one of the instruments to face the threat of weapons of mass destruction is the "Co-operative threat reduction" initiative targeted at support for disarmament, control and security of sensitive materials, facilities and expertise.

On September 28 of this year Italy sponsored a seminar in Geneva on this initiative which is gaining increasing attention within the international disarmament process. The seminar was a follow-up to a statement on the same subject made by my country at the Conference on Disarmament on January 20 and to a presentation last April at the NPT Preparatory Committee on the relevance of the CTR for the nuclear non-proliferation process. An official document was presented on that occasion. I take the opportunity of this thematic debate to draw for the first time the attention of the General Assembly on this issue in a comprehensive manner. The CTR is one of the most significant developments that have taken place in the past few years in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. It involves a growing number of countries. It has been widely debated in the G8 and the EU and has received wide attention from disarmament scholars. However rarely has it been discussed in multilateral disarmament fora.

The CTR initiative was originally developed in the early nineties and was inspired by Senators Nunn and Lugar of the United States. It refers to the process of international co-operation and assistance through which a large number of nuclear warheads and carriers have been destroyed or deactivated and WMD materials have been placed in safe storage.

The CTR is particularly relevant to nuclear disarmament. This is why I make this presentation under this cluster. But it also regards other weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological and radiological.
The implementation of disarmament engagements has brought to the attention of the international community that these engagements, be they multilateral, plurilateral or unilateral- are meaningless unless the weapons involved are either physically destroyed or appropriately disposed of. During the past years the enormous technical and financial problems connected with the actual elimination of armaments (both conventional and non conventional) have also come to the surface: the CTR is a multilateral effort aimed at addressing those problems.

Belarus, Canada, Kazakhstan, Japan, the European Union (and many of its member states on a national level) the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the United States, Uzbekistan and other countries have worked together -under the CTR initiative- to secure, dismantle and safeguard weapons of mass destruction, carriers and infrastructures. The culminating moment of this initiative took place in Kananaskis Canada, in June 2002, when the leaders of the G8 Group announced a “Global Partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction”. Participants at the Summit pledged to raise up to 20 billion US dollars over the following ten years to address these threats and in particular to “prevent terrorists, or those who harbour them, from acquiring or developing nuclear, chemical, radiological and biological weapons; missile and related materials equipment and technologies”. In addition to these important financial pledges, the G8 leaders also agreed on a comprehensive set of non-proliferation principles as well as on guidelines for implementation.

The Co-operative threat reduction has become one of the important instruments of the European strategy against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The total sum of 1,6 billion Euro was indicated as a Conference in Strasbourg last year as the global past and future financial engagement of the EU notably within the Kananaskis commitments and an ad hoc Action plan.

It is our belief that the time has come to present this concept to the First Committee of the General Assembly. The essence of our message is that not only do we have to face the problem of negotiating disarmament agreements, we also have to
cope with the additional problem of actually destroying those weapons. In some cases this requires an international co-operation, although the primary responsibility of countries for destruction and safety should remain unchanged.

We are not proposing at this stage an ad hoc resolution on this subject; we rather suggest a “horizontal” approach. We believe that the CTR concept should be reflected in some relevant UNGA First Committee resolutions. I refer in particular to those resolutions dealing with WMD disarmament.

We have already approached on a bilateral basis some delegations sponsoring those resolutions and have drawn their attention on the relevance of the CTR process for their texts. I wish to thank them for their interest and for a first positive response. The CTR also has significant environmental implications, since weapons elimination projects are to be implemented in an environmentally sound manner. This process might therefore also be of interest for sponsors of resolutions dealing with the link between disarmament and environmental norms.

Through you, Mr Chairman, I approach this entire body not only to illustrate this new reality but also to indicate our readiness to give more explanations on this initiative and offer additional language for future First Committee documents.