STATEMENT
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE
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FIRST COMMITTEE

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Chairperson,

Please accept my delegation's congratulations on your assumption of the chair of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly during its sixtieth session. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support and co-operation as you and your bureau lead the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

Chairperson,

South Africa is gravely concerned with the general lack of meaningful progress on nuclear disarmament and the apparent paralysis in one of the major parts of the United Nations disarmament machinery, the Conference on Disarmament. The failure of the 7th NPT Review Conference and the deadlock in the CD are an indictment that we have not risen to the challenge posed by nuclear weapons. These impediments to nuclear disarmament are manifestations of a serious lack of political will to implement previously agreed nuclear disarmament commitments and undertakings. They equally depict our lack of courage to negotiate on certain core issues that would advance nuclear disarmament. South Africa believes that this state of affairs leaves us in a precarious situation of questionable prospects for nuclear disarmament. Rather than dispel this view, the inability of the recent General Assembly High Level Summit to reach agreement on matters relating to nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation has entrenched it.

Despite this disappointing situation South Africa continues to believe that progress on both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation is required in order to attain the goal of a world free from nuclear weapons. Although this is not a new concept, South Africa strongly cautions against the tendency to place primary emphasis on one or the other of these aspects. If this tendency continues unabated the pivotal role of the NPT as the essential foundation for nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation would be undermined. In this connection South Africa strongly believes that if we wish to make progress, it should therefore be clear that all aspects of the NPT should be equally implemented and enforced. Each article of the NPT remains binding on all States Parties at all times and in all circumstances and it is imperative that all States Parties be held fully accountable for strict compliance with their obligations under the Treaty.

If we wish to make progress in the context of the Conference on Disarmament it is imperative that we concentrate our efforts on reaching agreement on a CD programme of work. It is beyond doubt that both the formal and informal meetings of the CD have thus far not led us any closer to reaching agreement on a programme of work. As a result of this deadlock in the CD, South Africa continues to believe that the A5 proposal presents us with a good opportunity of achieving this goal that has been elusive for the past eight years. It is time that there is increased and sharp focus in the CD on the A5 proposal.

In general it is time that we find innovative ways of dealing with lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, as well as the prevalent paralysis in the United Nations disarmament machinery in order to complement achievements made on small arms and light weapons and anti-personnel mines.

Chairperson,

South Africa continues to attach great importance to the implementation of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. South Africa and Colombia -- under the Co-ordinatureship of Japan -- will this year again
submit a resolution to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. We trust that all Members will be able to join the consensus on this resolution.

During 2005, South Africa actively participated in the second and third meetings of the Open-Ended Working Group to negotiate an international instrument to enable States to identify and trace, in a timely and reliable manner, illicit small arms and light weapons. In this regard my delegation commends the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group, Ambassador Anton Thalwender of Switzerland, for his efforts to forge a consensus on the instrument. Like many other delegations, South Africa would have preferred a legally binding instrument and we also supported the inclusion of ammunition in the instrument.

This having been said, we nevertheless see the instrument as a positive development in the small arms and light weapons field. In our view, the 2006 Small Arms Review Conference presents an important opportunity to further strengthen the international community’s call for action on illicit small arms and light weapons.

South Africa will naturally also follow future developments concerning the illicit brokering of small arms and light weapons with keen interest and we believe that we should adopt an ambitious approach in our collective endeavours to combat such activities.

Chairperson,

The question of anti-personnel mines has been an important issue for South Africa, even before the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty in 1999. We therefore valued participation in the First Review Conference of the Convention that was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in November/December last year, and which adopted the Nairobi Action Plan. We view the Sixth Meeting of States Parties later this year as an opportunity to further highlight the importance of the Mine Ban Treaty and to accelerate its implementation and universalisation to achieve the vision of a world free from anti-personnel mines. As one of the Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on the General Status and Operation of the Convention, South Africa continues to contribute to and facilitate the finalisation of the anticipated outcome documents of the Meeting.

In the area of biological weapons, we will continue to seek to strengthen the BTWC and believe that the 2006 Review Conference could provide the vehicle to collectively move forward in this important area.

In conclusion Chairperson,

South Africa continues to believe that the only effective way of dealing with weapons of mass destruction is through the established instruments in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. Universal adherence to, full implementation of and compliance with these international agreements and the complete elimination of all weapons of mass destruction is the only guarantee against the threat of and use of these weapons.

I thank you.