STATEMENT BY H. E. AMBASSADOR MARIA LUIZA RIBEIRO VIOTTI,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BRAZIL TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
at the General Debate of the First Committee

New York, 3 October 2011

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Mr. President,

I would like to congratulate you on your election to preside over the work of this First Committee. Rest assured of Brazil’s support to your presidency over the next weeks. We also thank the outgoing Chairman for the dedication with which he guided the Committee’s work.

I also salute Ambassador Sergio Duarte for his opening remarks and for his important work as UNSG High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

Mr. President,

The Fukushima incident last March has drawn international attention to the sensitivities associated with the use of nuclear energy, reminding us, in particular, of the key importance of reviewing nuclear safety conditions and promoting universal adherence to IAEA standards. Brazil has had the honor to preside over the IAEA ministerial conference on nuclear safety last June, and strongly supported the Director General’s nuclear safety action plan, which was approved some weeks ago. On September 22nd, President Dilma Rousseff was one of the key speakers of the opening session of the High Level Meeting on Nuclear Safety and Security, convened by Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. She gave an account of Brazil’s initiatives to conduct stress tests and review safety conditions in our nuclear power reactors, and called for a global endeavor to promote safety and security, which, in its broadest sense, comprises a renewed commitment to nuclear disarmament.

Nuclear disarmament should indeed remain our highest priority. We should not lose sight of the fact that nuclear weapons are the sole anthropogenic factor that can instantly destroy humanity and irreversibly change the face of the Earth. Furthermore, nuclear weapons perpetuate an intrinsically unbalanced state of affairs. States that have renounced the nuclear weapons option have, in fact, their fundamental security interests jeopardized by the very existence of nuclear arsenals.

More than twenty years after the end of the Cold War, rationales for possessing nuclear weapons have vanished. That notwithstanding, many thousands of nuclear weapons remain in a state of readiness. Some timeline or political horizon for their elimination from national arsenals is key.

While the conclusion and entry into force of the new bilateral treaty between the two major nuclear powers was a welcome step, other developments, in particular the modernization of weapons systems, and the reiteration of outdated concepts and doctrines of nuclear deterrence, continue to be a cause of concern. The unwillingness to forsake a “credible nuclear deterrent” is the main driver for further nuclear proliferation or possible access to nuclear weapons by non-State actors. As long as some States believe they need nuclear weapons for their own national security, other States or non-State actors might be tempted to resort to such weapons. Protracted action towards a nuclear-weapon-free world continues to be the main threat to a credible and self-sustaining non-proliferation regime, and to world peace and security.

It is therefore imperative that Nuclear Weapon States truly embrace all the nuclear disarmament related measures they have been called upon to implement, pursuant to the action plans agreed at the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences.

The meeting of the Nuclear-Weapon States held in Paris last July was a first step, but much more needs to be done, as we approach the next review cycle of the NPT and concrete, meaningful results will have to be presented to the other States Parties.
The New Agenda Coalition is once again tabling a draft resolution, entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free-world: accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament commitments". Ensuring significant support, this year, to this proposal would send a strong political signal of genuine commitment to nuclear disarmament, and pave the way for a successful implementation of NPT Article VI obligations in the coming years.

Mr. President,

Brazil considers that the nuclear weapon free zones provide an invaluable instrument of transparency and mutual trust and confidence. Today, the majority of UN Member States belong to nuclear weapon free zones, covering the entire Southern Hemisphere and adjacent areas, as well as Central Asia, the first Zone in the Northern Hemisphere. Latin America and the Caribbean have an impeccable track record of confidence-building measures and instruments that helped defuse conflict and tensions. The pioneering Treaty of Tlatelolco testifies to our region's commitment to peace and security and to the development of nuclear energy exclusively for peaceful purposes.

Another singular example of successful regional approach is the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting for and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC), whose 20th anniversary we are celebrating this year. As stated by the Brazilian Minister of External Relations, Antonio Patriota, ABACC's 20th anniversary "invites a reflection on the example of Brazil and Argentina as a source of inspiration for other regions of the world, such as the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula or South Asia. This idea becomes even more significant in view of the upcoming Conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East. (...) The Brazilian-Argentine agreement on a system of double international and regional safeguards has specific merits for further promoting mutual trust."

Brazil is confident that the November Forum to be convened by IAEA Director General as well as the 2012 Conference on the Middle East will provide unique opportunities for a thorough discussion on the various issues involved in the establishment of such a Zone. Most importantly, it will be imperative that such deliberations take place in a constructive atmosphere, without some of the well-known, preconceived arguments that are usually invoked to prevent the possibility of such a Zone ever taking place in the Middle East. Brazil stands ready to share its successful experiences regarding the Tlatelolco Treaty and ABACC in the promotion of transparency, trust and confidence.

Mr. President,

The Chemical Weapons Convention, the best offspring of the Conference on Disarmament, has been a success story in comparison with other instruments. As we near the deadlines for the final destruction of chemical weapon stockpiles, however, States Parties will have important decisions to make, in order to ensure the credibility of the CWC regime and to avoid precedents that could have a negative impact on efforts in other areas. We are confident that States Parties will be ready to meet this challenge.

The Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention, this coming November, confronts many uncertainties as to the future of the Convention's implementation. Discussions held so far have fallen short of expectations to reconcile verification and enhanced cooperation, while protecting sensitive information. Brazil believes that the resumption of negotiations on a protocol to strengthen the BWC should continue to deserve serious consideration, while interim alternatives or steps
should be contemplated with a view to promoting greater confidence among States Parties.

Mr. President,

Conventional arms may not threaten the survival of humanity but their widespread and irresponsible use continues to take a heavy humanitarian toll. Brazil has been an active participant in UN efforts related to transparency in armaments, confidence building and instruments envisaging to reconcile humanitarian law and legitimate defense needs, in particular the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its five Protocols.

Progress on banning anti-personnel landmines under the Ottawa Convention has been constant and meaningful. Yet much remains to be done in terms of demining, destruction of stocks and the universalization of this important instrument, since key States possessing landmines still remain outside the framework of the Convention.

A similar ban on cluster munitions, one that does not allow for exceptions in terms of certain sophisticated devices in the hands of a few, developed countries, has not been attained. Brazil has always been supportive of dealing with cluster munitions in the context of the CCW. We are encouraged by progress with a view to the conclusion of a sixth protocol to the convention at the upcoming review conference in November.

The Program of Action on small arms and light weapons is completing ten years. It is essential to persevere upon the work done. The illicit trafficking of these weapons, cause of uncountable deaths and of political instability in some quarters, should remain the focus of our efforts. In the same vein, we support ongoing deliberations on an Arms Trade Treaty to address unregulated trade and illicit trafficking in conventional weapons. While considerable divergence of views remains, we look forward to the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee and the 2012 Conference itself, hoping that such a gap can be bridged and that consensus can be reached on an ATT - one that is objective, universal, effective and non-discriminatory.

Mr. President,

The world we live in increasingly depends on outer space activities. An estimated 3,000 satellites are operational, providing vital services in an intricate web of information and communication, which is essential in today's world. There is a clear need for preventive disarmament. The placement of weapons, the destruction or damage of satellites from ground-based platforms, or the use of orbital objects to damage or destroy satellites, must be strictly prohibited. Negotiations on a legally binding instrument preventing the placement of any weapon systems in outer space should be an integral part of the Conference on Disarmament's programme of work, once it is attainable, in conjunction with nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation endeavors.

Mr. President,

The initiative of the Secretary General to organize a UNGA session on "revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations" corresponds to a widespread desire to resume substantive work at the CD, as the single multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations. Pointing fingers and trying to identify individual responsibilities for the longstanding impasse at the CD are to no avail. Actually, there are different countries opposing different agenda items, not only the FMCT, but also outer space, nuclear disarmament and negative security assurances. If we are to reform the CD, that must be part of an overall undertaking to
review the UN disarmament machinery, to which a IV SSOD would be most helpful.

At the core of the question is the lack of political will with regard to the elimination of nuclear weapons. A number of instruments are conducive to that goal, as it is the case of the CTBT, whose entry into force still depends on the ratification of some key countries. Getting the CD back to work means addressing the root causes of inaction. The difficulties that confront the CD stem neither from its rules of procedure, nor from its consensus rule. In the past, those same rules did not prevent us from agreeing to launch negotiations, even when certain substantive differences remained. We must thus spare no efforts in the quest for a solution to the current stalemate. At the same time, we should be careful in rushing for easy solutions that may have unexpected negative consequences for the very structure on which multilateral disarmament lies.

I thank you, Mr. President.