STATEMENT
BY
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DURING
THE GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE FIRST COMMITTEE

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Chairperson,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your assumption of the Chair of the 2011 First Committee Session. I wish to assure you of South Africa’s full support and co-operation as we work towards a successful session that will strengthen both the multilateral disarmament agenda and machinery. My delegation also associates itself with the statements delivered by the Africa Group, the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as the New Agenda Coalition.

Heeding your call for brevity and as South Africa will be delivering more detailed statements during the Committee’s thematic debates, this intervention will focus on South Africa’s national views on some issues in the multilateral discourse on disarmament and international security.

Chairperson,

South Africa, together with many world leaders, utilized the occasion of the General Assembly general debate to underscore the historic mandate of the UN and its responsibility to strive for disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. South Africa believes that it is of utmost importance given the mutually reinforcing relationship between disarmament, non-proliferation & arms control and the maintenance of international peace and security. South Africa is also of the view that there is an urgent and compelling need for concrete action on disarmament. My delegation is of the view that we must rise to the opportunity now created to advance disarmament and sustainable international security after a decade of stalemate and a tendency towards unilateralism.

Chairperson,

South Africa continues to be gravely concerned over the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction. Due to their reach and indiscriminate nature,
weapons threaten not only individual countries, but the international community as a whole. It is for this reason among others that South Africa has consistently reaffirmed its full commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons and to the multilateral system that seeks to advance this objective. South Africa believes that the only absolute guarantee against the use of such weapons is their complete elimination and the assurance that they will never be produced again. Nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are therefore inextricably linked, and continuous and irreversible progress is required on both fronts.

Chairperson,

For us in the developing world, poverty and the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons remain a serious threat and the real weapons of mass destruction. We welcome and strongly call for the establishment of effective partnerships to enhance the benefits of technical co-operation and assistance in the peaceful uses of nuclear, chemical and biological sciences, technologies and applications. South Africa believes that the intensification of the peaceful uses of the atom, biology and chemistry would contribute to the socio-economic upliftment of the developing countries while also placing them in good stead to realize their Millennium Development Goals benchmarks.

Containing the problems caused by the excessive accumulation of conventional weapons beyond absolute defence requirements is also critical to stability, peace and security which are, by the way, very necessary pre-conditions for socio-economic development. In this connection, my delegation is appreciative of the progress made since the last session of the First Committee in the field of conventional weapons.
Chairperson,

South Africa is committed to a rules-based international system and to strengthening multilateral governance in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. South Africa is disappointed that the United Nations Disarmament Commission, as the sole deliberative body in the UN disarmament machinery, concluded another of its three-year cycles without any substantive results. It is equally regrettable that the Conference on Disarmament (CD), which has the responsibility to conduct multilateral disarmament negotiations, has once again this year failed to commence negotiations on any of the items on its agenda.

Amid this continuing impasse, South Africa welcomes the emerging resolve amongst States that it can no longer be business as usual in the disarmament machinery. Even as consensus on the appropriate remedies continues to elude us, there seems to be broad agreement on the need to ensure that these institutions serve the purposes for which they were created. South Africa believes that with the necessary determination and political will, the disarmament machinery can once again contribute to international peace and security by developing consensus norms to address issues in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Chairperson,

Before I conclude my statement, I would like to remind this august gathering that the primary mandate of our Committee is Disarmament and International Security. It is a cause of concern to my delegation that little is done to reflect this at both the deliberative and even more at the practical levels of our work. The largest of weapons possessors are not moving far enough in translating into practice their political commitment to disarmament and international security. On the contrary, they are selectively focussing on non-proliferation in a manner that
does not recognize the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationship between disarmament and non-proliferation. Likewise, disarmament is dealt with in a manner that falls far too short of improving the prospects of international security even though we have witnessed the colossal effects of conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction in the past two world wars, in the aftermath of nuclear bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki and during the Iran/Iraq war in the 1980s.

Chairperson,

My delegation stands ready to work with you, all Members of the UN and civil society with a view to supporting substantive progress on the multilateral disarmament agenda in order to strengthen the multilateral system of governance in order to enhance and maintain of international peace and security; and to thereby contribute towards sustainable development.

I thank you.