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«GENERAL DEBATE»

Mr Chair,

My delegation would like to congratulate you on your election as Chair of the First Committee and wishes you every success in this important task.

Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

The overriding objective of this First Committee must be to contribute to building a safer world. This is only conceivable on the basis of a shared understanding of the current security challenges.

Yet we have to recognise that our security environment has become more unpredictable, complex and interdependent. This observation applies to both the origins of crises and conflicts and their consequences. It also extends to the responses that the international community has the responsibility of providing to them.
A world that is more complex and threatening as the advancement of Daesh in the theatres of Iraq and Syria challenges the very principles and values of our democratic societies, right up to Europe. This re-emerging threat of heinous terrorism was tragically experienced by France with the attacks in Paris in early 2015.

Finally, an interdependent world, as the crises and their responses can no longer be confined to a single country or region. From Libya to Yemen, from the Sahel-Saharan strip to Somalia, the rise in radical extremism, the proliferation of trafficking and the political crises are deeply destabilising. They are causing huge flows of refugees and migrants, especially towards Europe.

Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

When facing these developments, we can neither lower our guard, nor fail to fulfil our obligations.

Our determination to safeguard respect for international law, as an indispensable foundation for our collective security, must be unwavering. In this respect, the integrity of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and of all other international instruments for disarmament, arms control, including conventional arms, and non-proliferation, cannot be called into question.

We must also continue to have an unfailing commitment to defending the values of democracy and human rights. Our action must continue to be guided by the Charter of the United Nations.

Finally, our aspiration to achieve greater international solidarity, as well as more effective and representative multilateralism must be able to rely on the mobilisation of each of our governments. The First Committee, and more generally, the whole disarmament machinery, serve as essential forums for debate, and they must be able to play their role fully. And while consensus cannot be a goal in itself, it remains, it is a fact, a crucial catalyst for the convergence of objectives and actions, between States.

Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

It is with these clear concerns in mind that France remains fully committed to contributing to international peace and security.
The continuation of the Minsk process must remain the main avenue for achieving a political solution to the Ukrainian crisis. France’s support for the actions conducted by the coalition against Daesh has received strong backing and is continuing today with a reinforcement of surveillance activities in Syria. Following on from the interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic, the operations conducted by France today in the Sahel-Saharan strip and Central Africa aim, in coordination with all the countries involved and in addition to the actions of the European Union and United Nations, to consolidate the sustainable conditions for stability and peace on this continent. It is also this spirit which governs France’s actions for maritime security.

These are just a few examples of France’s broader commitment to the objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. Paris will also soon be hosting the major event of COP21.

Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

It is with the same determination that France has been fully involved in the resolution of proliferation crises, which, in 2015, saw significant developments.

The agreement concluded by the Six and Iran in Vienna on 14 July 2015 is an important step towards a gradual restoration of the international community’s confidence in the Iranian nuclear programme. France’s commitment, among the Six, in its long and complex negotiation, has contributed to the definition of a robust mechanism, which should be implemented with vigilance. It is consequently with a renewed energy that we need to seek a way out of the proliferation crisis in North Korea, which is continuing to develop its nuclear and ballistic programmes in violation of the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. North Korea recently announced that it intended shortly to conduct a space launch, one that would use ballistic technologies and would consequently be illicit. If North Korea refused dialogue once again and opted for confrontation, it would be a new challenge for the international community, which would consequently need to react with resolution and determination. Finally, the issue of Syria’s nuclear activities needs to be clarified.

The recurring allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria continue to be a major source of concern. The investigative and attribution mechanism established by the United Nations Security Council on 7 August 2015 will need to be based on the cooperation of all parties. To put a definitive end to the chemical threat, the complete and definitive dismantling of Syria’s chemical programme must remain a priority, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and resolution 2118 of the UNSC.
Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

France is convinced that an ambitious vision of the challenges of nuclear disarmament must continue to be based on a gradual approach of the progress to be achieved. It is only with the commitment of all and a shared awareness of the current security challenges that we will be able to move towards the emergence of a safer world.

The increasing polarisation, from year to year, of debates on nuclear disarmament is counterproductive. It is much more the consistency of acts with speeches than simply the pressure of judgements and words that will bring about progress. For decades, the serious consequences of the use of nuclear weapons have been the subject of major studies. However, the specific nature of nuclear weapons compared to other weapons of mass destruction must be taken into account. Chemical and biological weapons cannot constitute a basis for a policy of deterrence. Consequently, a purely legal approach would offer no realistic prospects to move ahead with nuclear disarmament. We will not reach the top of the ladder by removing the rungs... Provided they avoid these pitfalls and remain inclusive, the exchanges of this First Committee can count on France's openness to dialogue. In addition, the lack of a final agreement during the NPT Review Conference should not lead us to forget the invaluable contribution that the three pillars of this Treaty make to international security. Our support to the NPT must be unquestionable, because it remains the essential basis for both nuclear disarmament and the promotion of civil nuclear energy, and our main safeguard against proliferation crises. In this context, we remain committed to the implementation of nuclear disarmament within the framework of Article VI of the NPT, the prospect of general and complete disarmament, and the 64-point action plan on the three pillars of the NPT adopted by consensus in 2010.

In his speech at Istres, on 19 February 2015, the President of the French Republic called on the other nuclear powers to follow the example set by France both with regard to transparency over its forces and installations and in terms of disarmament commitments. The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the launch of negotiations on the treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices (FMCT) continue to be France's two main priorities. Consequently, it is indeed to contribute to achieving these new steps that France has put efforts into the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on FMCT, of which it has welcomed the adoption of the report by consensus, and that it has submitted a draft treaty to its partners. We would like the framework of this First Committee to confirm the momentum created by these important contributions, by encouraging further structured and in-depth discussions on FMCT within the framework of the Conference of Disarmament.
Mr Chair, dear colleagues,

Other important events have also received full attention from France.

The objectives for the full implementation and universalisation of the Arms Trade Treaty are core priorities for France, because the consequences of unregulated arms transfers and illicit trafficking can be disastrous both for the socioeconomic development of countries and for their political stability. The success of the First Conference of States Parties, to which my country actively contributed, was essential: it now allows us to have the structures that are indispensable for working towards the Treaty’s ambitious objectives and facilitating the participation of all States from all regions of the world and civil society alike. This Treaty, as it has been devised concerns us all, importers and exporters, transit and destination countries, in all regions of the world. This is why it is crucial for it to become this demanding global and universal framework that France is calling for.

If we turn to space: the space sector is today subject to an important increase in human activities, with spillover effects on the economy, research and innovation in a growing number of countries. For these peaceful activities to thrive, security in space must be maintained and, of course, the risk of an arms race must be eliminated. Facing these challenges requires taking full account of the specific nature of the space sector: the interconnectedness of the civilian and military sectors, the dangers related to debris, and other dangers. For immediate action, the initiative of the Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities, which establishes crosscutting rules on the basis of voluntary political commitments, remains, in our view, the most promising. We would also like the meeting of the First and Fourth Committees, which will be held on 22 October 2015, to allow us to further analyse the development of confidence-building and transparency measures, which are essential in ensuring security in outer space.

Finally, we have the responsibility of anticipating the future. This is indeed the purpose of the initiative led by France on lethal autonomous weapons systems. The interest generated by this debate, among both our governments and civil society, and the expertise that has already been mobilized to identify all the implications, demonstrate that this subject was worth addressing. We need to have an attentive and rigorous understanding of this phenomenon in order to foster the broadest possible convergence of views. The high-quality work conducted in 2015 in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) showed that this forum was an entirely relevant place to address all the complex dimensions of the subject. It is in this context, and bearing in mind
the CCW review conference in 2016, that France will continue to contribute to the work on LAWS.

Mr Chair, my dear colleagues,

Since the vision of a better world for future generations is essential, its implementation must be anchored in the present, through concrete commitments and inclusive processes. It is with determination and a sense of reality that France is committed to being fully involved in the discussions which are starting today in the framework of this First Committee.

Thank you.