Chairperson,

My delegation wishes to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairperson of the 2015 First Committee and to associate itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition. In the interest of time, this statement will be limited to general comments on the key issues that will be covered more extensively in our national statements during the thematic debates.

Chairperson,

As we meet for another First Committee Session, we are reminded of the events 70 years ago with the establishment of the United Nations, the first use of nuclear weapons and the adoption of the very first UN resolution primarily devoted to the elimination of atomic weapons. As we reflect on the historic and more recent achievements of the UN in the area of international security and disarmament, we are also reminded of the unfinished business and the hard work that lies ahead.

We welcome the advances made during the past year in strengthening the multilateral disarmament and international security environment, however, much remains to be done. Of particular concern is the continuing impasse in the UN disarmament machinery established under the First Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament in 1978. The 19-year stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the lack of agreement in the UN Disarmament Commission for many years are impacting negatively on the multilateral system.

The general lack of progress on nuclear disarmament is a source of growing frustration among the vast majority of UN Member States. Achievements in the area of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation remain particularly uneven. The regime established by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is constantly re-affirmed by the majority of the international community and many creative measures are introduced to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation, yet nuclear disarmament obligations and commitments continue to be subjected to reinterpretation and further conditionalities. This is simply not sustainable. The argument that nuclear weapons are indispensable for the security of some States, but not for others, is not only illogical, by also lacks any credibility. It is South Africa’s firm belief that nuclear weapons do not provide security, but rather exacerbate insecurity.

The Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Vienna, Austria, in December 2014 again reminded us of the devastating impact that a nuclear detonation would have. The very existence of nuclear weapons means that humanity faces the peril of a nuclear catastrophe and all States should share the responsibility to prevent any use of these weapons. As our President, Mr Jacob Zuma said in his statement to the General Assembly on 29 September 2015: “There can be no safe hands for nuclear weapons”. South Africa therefore welcomes the “Humanitarian Pledge”, which in particular, urges all States Parties to the NPT to renew their commitment to the urgent and full
implementation of existing obligations under Article VI, and calls upon all States to identify and pursue effective measures to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons and to cooperate with all stakeholders to achieve this goal. While South Africa does not intend hosting a follow-up international conference on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons in the very near future, options for taking forward the humanitarian initiative remain under consideration.

South Africa is deeply concerned by the failure of the 9th NPT Review Conference to reach consensus on an outcome document. This was a missed opportunity that could have contributed to strengthening the Treaty. We are equally concerned about the continued failure to implement the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, including the convening of a Conference in 2012 on the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in that region. We therefore call upon all States Parties to the NPT to implement all commitments and obligations agreed on in 1995, 2000 and 2010, without further delay.

In the area of chemical weapons, South Africa welcomes the further progress made towards the destruction of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We also welcome the progress made by other major possessor States Parties to destroy their remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, abandoned chemical weapons and old chemical weapons. No cause could ever justify the use of such weapons or any other weapon of mass destruction, by any actor, under any circumstances.

Chairperson,

Regarding conventional weapons, South Africa, as a State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, will play its part on the journey towards a world free of both anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. We encourage those States that have not yet done so, particularly those possessing such weapons, to join these instruments without further delay. We call on those States in a position to do so, to assist requesting States in their national implementation efforts and to provide assistance to the victims of these weapons.

South Africa continues to believe that the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UNPoA) represents the central, universally agreed set of undertakings to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and that its full implementation remains as relevant today as when it was adopted in 2001. Apart from national implementation efforts, the full implementation of the entire UNPoA, including those provisions related to international co-operation and assistance, remains of critical importance. Likewise, we look forward to the full implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty, which represents a landmark in the regulation of international trade in conventional arms and contribute towards curbing illicit transfers.

My delegation stands ready to participate actively in the work of this year’s First Committee and to join you and other delegations in making a success of our work.

I thank you.