PORTUGAL

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Statement by
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Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
Permanent Representative

General Debate of
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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ambassador Karel van Oosterom,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you for your appointment as Chairman of this Committee and let me assure you of our delegation’s full cooperation. I am sure that under your able leadership, we will once again be promoting the goals of a safer world with enhanced international peace and undiminished security for all.

Portugal fully aligns itself with the statement previously delivered by the European Union and would like to make further comments from a national perspective.

Mr. Chairman,

Portugal strongly believes that any global international process aimed to promote disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control and international security should fully respect the key principles of inclusiveness and multilateralism, in strict abidance to the realms of Universal Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and Protection of Civilians. Those are the major pre-conditions, in our view, to achieve effective progresses in collectively building-up a safer and durable international security environment.

Advancing human security shall be our first and foremost objective. In this regard, we share specific humanitarian, moral and legal concerns related to ongoing developments on a set of the so-called “new era warfare tools”, including proliferation of armed drones, lethal autonomous weapons system eventual development, cyberspace aggressive use and, finally, risks of militarization of the outer space. We encourage, as a matter of urgency, the continuation of ongoing international discussions and initiatives on these subjects, both at political and technical levels. These discussions should take into account, in our view, the need to promote transparency and applicable international law or, when needed, the establishment of regulatory multilateral security frameworks responsive to the objective of protecting civilians and Human Rights universal requirements.
Mr. Chairman,

Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation remain at the core of our agenda. As many others, we were disappointed by the inability to reach a consensual final document at the end of the recently held NPT Review Conference. Nevertheless, we are convinced that progresses verified during the discussions should be seen as a valid basis of work for future negotiations.

Our common objective of a world without nuclear weapons must be resolutely pursued in the interest of all Mankind. Saving future generations of the persistent threat of catastrophic nuclear detonations, by intention or accident, is indeed a major ethical imperative for all of us and, ultimately, a request of survival for Mankind. At this regard, we welcome the well-grounded international debate on the catastrophic humanitarian impact of nuclear weapon detonations, stressing the need for further steps in pursuing nuclear disarmament, in an effective and resolute way. More should and could be done. We favour, at this regard and inter other measures, the establishment of an inclusive Open-Ended Working Group.

We also take this opportunity to appeal to all States, I repeat, all States that have not yet done so to accede to the Non Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapons states, without pre-conditions, and to the AIEA.

On a more positive front, we are pleased to acknowledge that 2015 has seen a remarkable breakthrough in the case of Iran. Through the signature of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, endorsed by the Security Council, and of the Roadmap for clarification of outstanding issues - this one with the IAEA - Iran and the international community achieved a crucial compromise which we hope will be kept through the full implementation of both agreements.

Unfortunately, similar considerations cannot be applied in connexion with the DPRK and Syria-related outstanding nuclear issues. We reiterate the appeal to these states to fully comply with their obligations regarding the IAEA and the NPT.

Mr. Chairman,

It's crystal clear that there is an urgent need on taking forward multilateral and effective disarmament negotiations. However, this endeavor requires
inclusiveness and true multilateralism. It shall be reminded that the Conference on Disarmament establishment in 1978 clearly upheld these pre-requisites, through the final document of the UNGA Tenth Special Session. It’s very regrettable that, 16 years passed since the last enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament membership, its doors remain closed to all States, including mine, who presented their interest in becoming CD’s full Parties. We believe that the nomination of a dedicated Special Rapporteur could be a valid concrete option in order to advance discussions at this regard.

The fact is that, beyond the enlargement of its membership, the Conference on Disarmament remains in an agonizing stalemate requiring, even more, a joint commitment and collective constructive work to overpass it. The adoption and subsequent implementation of new disarmament treaties and agreements is a critical task to pursue, as it is crucial to preserve and promote existing internationally agreed disarmament and arms control instruments.

Mr. Chairman,

We welcome the outstanding work of the OPCW and of the International Community in Syria. It stands out as an illustration of success achievable when joint political commitment mobilizes the required collective efforts and action. Notwithstanding, we remain concerned by official reports of chlorine use in Syria and by alleged recent chemical weapons’ use in Iraq. We acknowledge with appreciation the last August Security Council-consensually adopted mechanism aimed to assess responsibilities over the chemical attacks in Syria. We call in all parties to cooperate fully in the investigation, in line with SC Res. 2235/2015 and 2118/2013.

It’s particularly alarming that non-state actors, including radical extremist and terrorist groups, might gain access to means and expertise related to the different types of weapons of massive destruction or even of conventional weapons of indiscriminate impact, as “dirty” bombs, “barrel bombs” and other IED (improvised explosive devices). This threat must be urgently addressed by the international community, in a coordinated and cooperative way.
Mr. Chairman,

Outer Space remains and should continue to be a weapon free zone. To achieve this goal, it’s of paramount importance that multilateral legal instruments be established in order to ensure that Outer Space is only used for peaceful, scientific and development goals. The draft International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities, which enjoys the full support of Portugal is, in our view, a meaningful example of the kind of instruments required for that purpose.

By adopting this Code, States would be subscribing to a new confidence building measures framework, as highlighted in the conclusions of the Group of Governmental Experts established to conduct a study on outer space transparency and confidence-building measures report. We look forward and confidently to the 22nd October’s joint meeting of the 1st and 4th committees on the broadly outer space related issues.

Mr. Chairman,

The ATT is a major achievement of the international community, and, as many other member States, we are very pleased for its relatively early entry in force and for the results of its 1st Conference of State Parties, in Mexico. Now, focus must be put on the universalization and robust implementation of the Treaty which we hope will very positively impact in regions affected by conflict, extremist threats or emerging from conflicts, causing huge harm between civilians.

It should also be reminded that, for the first time, the UN General Assembly has at its disposal a legally-binding instrument aimed to regulate the legal conventional arms trade in direct benefit of global security, regional stability and protection of civilians, contributing at the same time to advance Human Rights and the 2030 Development Agenda. Moreover, also for the first time, the link between gender-based violence and the global arms trade is enshrined in a multilateral treaty. Portugal appeals to all States not yet Parties to ratify or accede to the ATT as soon as feasible.

In what concerns the illicit traffic and production of small arms and light weapons (SALW), Portugal shares the International Community concerns about the very negative consequences of this phenomenon, particularly affecting some of the poorest, more vulnerable and more instable countries and regions of our world. My country has been contributing with expertise in the framework of several EU initiatives and programmes aimed to
reinforce national and regional capacities to address this traffic, including in the Sahel Region and Mali.

Mr. Chairman,

The reportedly renewed use of prohibited Cluster Munitions in populated areas in Libya, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, deserve our strongest condemnation. Also, the recurrent use of barrel bombs in Syria cannot pass unnoticed and without firm criticism and the same applies to the indiscriminate use in various parts of our world of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), incendiary weapons and anti-personnel mines, particularly in civilian populated areas.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, I would like to stress that Portugal strongly believes in the need to systematically consider Humanitarian Law and Human Rights' values and requirements in all disarmament and non-proliferation discussions and initiatives, with an active involvement of civil society actors, thus upholding the interdependence and synergies between the major core principles and goals of the United Nations: Peace, Security, Human Protection and Development.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.