Mr. Chair,

My delegation extends congratulations to you as you lead the First Committee, the work of which is critical to the mandate of the United Nations to bring about a more peaceful and stable world.

At the outset of its seventieth session, Pope Francis addressed the General Assembly and spoke directly of the challenges we deal with in this Committee. He noted that “the constant tendency to the proliferation of arms, especially weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons,” is contrary to the foundations of the fundamental juridical framework set out in the Preamble and the first Article of the Charter of the United Nations, and in practice denies them. The Pope affirmed that “an ethics and a law based on the threat of mutual destruction - and possibly the destruction of all mankind - are self-contradictory and an affront to the entire framework of the United Nations, which would end as 'nations united by fear and distrust.' There is an urgent need to work for a world free of nuclear weapons, in full application of the Non-proliferation Treaty, in letter and spirit, with the goal of a complete prohibition of these weapons.”

Recalling the words of Pope Francis and noting the failure of the Ninth Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to agree on a final document, the Holy See wishes to underline once more that nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction are irreconcilable with, and contrary to, an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence among peoples and among States.

We are painfully aware that the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is languishing, despite the important efforts highlighted at the IX Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT, held just two weeks ago, pursuant to Article XIV of the Treaty. This step towards a world free of nuclear weapons is long overdue.

Similarly, the beginning of negotiations to establish a binding cessation of the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons has languished in the Conference on Disarmament. This failure has prevented the establishment of a subsidiary body that, even though it would not have a mandate to negotiate further steps or building blocks in that body, could nevertheless consider many aspects of nuclear disarmament that require such deliberation.

Moreover, it still remains to be seen whether the General Assembly will decide to establish an open-ended working group with a similar mandate. Both options were provided for in the unadopted final document of the Ninth NPT Review Conference, and neither was known to have presented an obstacle to agreement.
It is incumbent upon the United Nations to redouble its efforts to advance these processes, underway for decades but currently moribund, that aim to reduce further the role of nuclear weapons in international security.

On the other side of the ledger, the Holy See recognizes and welcomes the ongoing successful implementation of the New START agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States, under which the numbers of nuclear weapons continue to be reduced. It has also taken positive note of the Joint Comprehensive Program of Action between Iran, the permanent members of the Security Council, Germany and the European Union. For the first time in many years, there are reasons to hope that the concerns and tensions arising from the nuclear energy program in Iran may be laid to rest as the Program of Action is implemented.

With these ongoing positive developments, it should be possible to generate momentum for negotiations to reduce further the nuclear weapons stockpiles of states, whether bilaterally or through a broader process, and to halt the further buildup of nuclear arsenals in those possessing states not parties to the NPT, thus enabling the setting of ceilings on the numbers of nuclear weapons globally.

The NPT is a vital component of the international structure of arms control agreements, but it has not managed to become universal. This Committee is an appropriate venue to press for constraints on non-Party States leading to reductions of nuclear arsenals.

Similarly, this Committee has a strong interest in reestablishing and bringing forward with greater determination the long overdue process towards a Middle East free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The tensions and conflicts in the Middle East warrant our urgent efforts to support cooperation in the region, as well as in other regions of the world.

The 2016 Nuclear Security Summit should further work to constrain not only nuclear weapon materials, but radiological materials more broadly, lest they become subject to theft and use as “dirty bombs”.

Non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament are vital elements of advancing global security and stability. Without them, the achievement of the just adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is jeopardized. The Holy See joins with all persons of good will in seeking a future in which the threat of nuclear disasters will have been eliminated and the use of force to resolve conflicts between states will be increasingly reduced, pursuant to verifiable agreements. The ideal of global governance based on trust can surely one day be reached, with the principle of Pacta sunt servanda as key.

Mr. Chair,

As Pope Francis wrote on the occasion of the III Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, “a global ethic is needed if we are to reduce the nuclear threat and work towards nuclear disarmament.” To promote this “global ethic,” we must encourage States and civil society to pursue initiatives aimed at a deeper understanding of the grave humanitarian effects of the use of nuclear weapons. Such initiatives are not only to be encouraged; they should be deemed necessary if we are to build public awareness on the moral imperative to abolish nuclear weapons.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.