STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

22 October 2015

Chairperson,

Given the devastating humanitarian consequences associated with the use of weapons of mass destruction, no cause could ever justify the use of such weapons by any actor under any circumstances. To my delegation it is clear that the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction should remain one of our key priorities. This includes achieving the universality and full and non-discriminatory implementation of all the provisions of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), as well as transparent, irreversible and verifiable progress towards nuclear disarmament.

In the area of chemical weapons, South Africa welcomes the significant progress achieved in the elimination and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs). We further recognize the efforts of the international community towards the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons. We have taken note of developments and recent reports relating to the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the Republic of Iraq. We are especially concerned by reports of alleged use of chemical weapons by non-state actors. South Africa supports the joint efforts of the OPCW and the UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and in this regard encourages the development of clear mandates, clearly defined scope of work and activities, specific time-frames and clear terms of reference to assist in bringing the perpetrators to book.

We also welcome the progress made by other major possessor States Parties to destroy their remaining chemical weapons (CW) stockpiles, abandoned chemical weapons and old chemical weapons. In the case of chemical weapons stockpiles we take note that all possessor States Parties are on track to meet the planned completion dates to destroy their remaining CW stockpiles. Early this year, in April in Ieper, Belgium, we commemorated the centenary of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons. The Ieper Declaration provided a clear indication of the commitment by all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

South Africa recognizes the role of the CWC in enhancing regional and international peace and security as set out in the Convention and the importance of ensuring its universality. The object and purpose of the Convention will only be fully realized once complete universality is achieved. We therefore call upon States not yet Party to the Convention to accede to it without further delay.

Whilst positively disposed to the current debate on the future priorities and role of the OPCW beyond 2025, the role of non-state actors in relation to the CWC, the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism (OEWG - T), as well as discussions around the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons, we believe that in the short term, the objectives and primary focus of the OPCW must remain on complete disarmament and the elimination of all declared chemical weapons under strict and effective international control in accordance with the Convention.
Chairperson,

South Africa remains committed to strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) to ensure that our common goal of preventing the threat posed by biological weapons is achieved. My delegation remains concerned about the threat posed by naturally occurring organisms, as well as by those that could be deliberately manufactured and manipulated for use as weapons of mass destruction. It is critical that our common goal of eliminating the threat posed by biological weapons is achieved.

Besides the obvious security benefits of the BWC, the Convention also contains important co-operation and assistance provisions that could strengthen the international community’s ability to combat the debilitating impact of disease on the health of people and on the socio-economic development of countries. South Africa therefore believes that greater international coordination and assistance is required to alleviate the burden of threat posed by biological weapons. Initiatives such as the exchange in biological sciences and technology, the promotion of capacity building in the fields of disease surveillance, detection and diagnosis, as well as the containment of infectious diseases, among many others, could be further explored.

Chairperson,

The inter-sessional process agreed to during the 7th BWC Review Conference provides an opportunity for States Parties to strengthen the implementation of the Convention in some important areas. In this regard, South Africa actively contributed to the discussions on Article VII by submitting a Working Paper on procedures for assistance under this Article, which also suggested possible guidelines for requesting assistance.

South Africa remains concerned about the Ebola outbreak which illustrated the importance of international co-operation and assistance in the combating and management of disease outbreaks. South Africa believes that it may be useful at some stage to analyse the international assistance and response to the Ebola outbreak with a view to identifying lessons that could be useful with regard to the implementation of Article VII. In this context, South Africa welcomes the forthcoming Review Conference and the need for States Parties to effectively use the remainder of the intersessional process to develop the necessary ‘common understandings and effective action’ in order to strengthen the implementation of the treaty.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, the universalisation of the BWC and the CWC is crucial for the effective eradication of all biological and chemical weapons. We therefore call upon those countries not yet party to these Conventions to join without further delay.

I thank you.