STATEMENT
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DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK
17 OCTOBER 2016

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Chairperson,

South Africa associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

As long as nuclear weapons exist, humankind will continue to face the threat of nuclear annihilation. Since the impact of any use of nuclear weapons — including the longer-term humanitarian, environmental and socio-economic consequences — cannot be constrained in space and time, nuclear weapons cannot be treated simply as a matter of national security concern for the few States that possess such weapons. By their very nature, nuclear weapons threaten the security of us all. All States therefore have a legitimate stake in, and responsibility for, nuclear disarmament. With rising tensions and increasing insecurity around the globe, coupled with the threat of non-State actor access to such capabilities, we recognise the ever-increasing risk of the use of nuclear weapons, whether by accident, miscalculation or design.

Chairperson,

The lack of progress towards achieving our shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons has become a source of growing frustration. The NPT regime is constantly re-affirmed with various measures being implemented to strengthen nuclear non-proliferation, yet the other side of the NPT bargain, nuclear disarmament, continues to be subjected to reinterpretation and the imposition of further conditions for progress. This has caused serious divisions and created a credibility crisis for the regime.

The continued development and modernisation of nuclear arsenals and their delivery systems, and the fact that nuclear weapons remain entrenched in security doctrines, suggest that some may harbour aspirations for the indefinite retention of these weapons, contrary to their obligations and commitments, including the unequivocal undertaking by nuclear-weapon States towards the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The failure of the last NPT Review process to produce an agreed outcome has added to tensions stemming from the lack of commitment by some to fulfil their disarmament obligations. Beyond the obligation to engage in negotiations in good faith on effective measures towards nuclear disarmament, it also includes, among others, commitments to deeper reductions in the number of nuclear weapons; reducing reliance on nuclear weapons in military doctrines; the entry-into-force of
the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); and the conclusion of a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, all of which remain unfulfilled.

In addition, the vast resources that continue to be devoted to the production and maintenance of nuclear weapons, stand in sharp contrast to the limited resources directed towards socio-economic development, including for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Chairperson,

Given the catastrophic consequences and associated risks, all efforts must be exerted to eliminate the threat posed by nuclear weapons. We have long recognised that the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances is through their total elimination and the legally-binding assurance that they will never be produced again.

South Africa welcomes the commitment to nuclear disarmament displayed by the vast majority of States during the Open-ended Working Group on “Taking Forward Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament Negotiations” in Geneva earlier this year. Not only does the OEWG report reinforce the work that still needs to be undertaken in fulfilment of existing obligations and commitments, it also accurately reflects the proposals made aimed at achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons, including steps to reduce risks, interim measures and a range of partial and more comprehensive legally-binding measures.

Beyond the systematic and progressive steps already agreed to by the nuclear-weapon States, there was widespread support for the recommendation to the General Assembly to convene a conference in 2017 to negotiate a treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. While such a treaty may not yield immediate results, it would constitute a significant step towards filling a glaring gap in the international legal architecture pertaining to the legality of nuclear weapons. Our support for such a step towards fulfilling our obligations under Article VI of the NPT is without prejudice to the realisation of existing nuclear disarmament commitments, as well as future negotiations on additional legally-binding instruments, that will be required to achieve and maintain a more secure world without nuclear weapons.

Chairperson,

The upcoming NPT Review Cycle provides an opportunity for State Parties to reverse the confidence gap created through the non-implementation of obligations and commitments. Only through faithful implementation will we be able to ensure the continued vitality of the NPT, as the foundation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.
Let me reiterate that nuclear weapons have no place in today’s security environment. Instead of deterring war and conflict as some argue, these weapons remain a constant source of national, regional and global insecurity and a driver of proliferation.

In conclusion, Chairperson, nuclear disarmament is not only a legal obligation, but also a moral and ethical imperative. In this regard, South Africa again has the honour, on behalf of the co-sponsors, to table the resolution entitled “Ethical Imperatives for a world without nuclear weapons”, which contains only technical updates to last year’s resolution and which we hope would receive wide support.

I thank you.