STATEMENT
BY
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DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON THE DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

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Chairperson,

We welcome advances made during the past year in strengthening the international rule of law in the multilateral disarmament and international security environment. Regrettably, the progress achieved in the conventional weapons environment and on chemical weapons have not been matched in the area of nuclear disarmament. Of particular concern to South Africa is the continuing impasse in the UN disarmament machinery. The prolonged stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) and the lack of agreement in the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) are impacting negatively on the multilateral system. These bodies must be allowed to discharge their respective mandates in order to remain relevant.

Chairperson,

My delegation is disappointed that the UN Disarmament Commission's April 2016 session ended with no conclusive agreement. This is unfortunately symptomatic of the stalemate that has marked the UNDC's deliberations for sixteen years. On the two main agenda items relating to nuclear weapons and conventional weapons, no progress was made, given the lack of agreement on these issues. That said, there is still reason to believe that we can achieve the progress needed in order for the UNDC to make a set of concrete recommendations to the General Assembly during this cycle, provided each State commits to progress.

While there was also some discussion on the inclusion of a third item on the agenda during this Substantive Session, it is not clear if the inclusion of such an item will not further hamper progress on the UNDC's agenda. Nonetheless, my delegation is open to further informal consultations on this proposal. South Africa will continue to strive, together with other delegations, to achieve tangible progress during the April 2017 Substantive Session of the UNDC.
Chairperson,

My delegation is equally concerned by the 20-year stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). At the heart of the problem lies the continued resistance by a small number of States to implement their disarmament obligations and to subject themselves to the international rule of law. As a country committed to the resumption of substantive work in the CD, we have always exercised the greatest level of flexibility.

South Africa commends all the Presidents of the 2016 CD Session for their efforts to develop a Programme of Work (PoW). However, we are disappointed that the CD could again not reach consensus so as to resume substantive work, raising questions about its role as the world’s single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum.

South Africa welcomes the statement delivered by Guatemala on behalf of IGOS to the Conference on Disarmament and supports many of the sentiments expressed by the group.

Chairperson,

The three international conferences on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons held since 2012 and the Open-Ended Working Group of the UN General Assembly on nuclear disarmament that convened in Geneva this year provided inclusive platforms for the international community to explore options for taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations aimed at achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons. In this context, the OEWG has now recommended to the General Assembly to convene a Conference in 2017 to commence negotiations on a Treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. While such a Treaty may not achieve immediate results, it could, as an interim step, address a glaring gap in the international legal architecture on the legality of nuclear weapons. Such a Treaty would also strengthen the NPT and underline the urgency of accelerating the implementation of nuclear disarmament obligations and related commitments.

Chairperson,
With further activities planned for 2017, South Africa believes that solutions can be found and that multilateral governance and the international rule of law in the area of disarmament could be strengthened. We therefore remain ready to consider any proposals that would genuinely assist in breaking the impasse in the UN multilateral disarmament machinery. Negotiations are essential if we are to strengthen the international rule of law, which is key to promoting peace and security, where all countries are able to play by the same rules. Such negotiations are also vital if we are to achieve the requisite progress on nuclear disarmament that the world community seeks. South Africa will remain actively and constructively engaged in the multilateral disarmament fora with a view to seeking solutions.

I thank you.