Mr Chair,

I have the privilege to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

An important task of the UN General Assembly’s First Committee is to take stock of where we stand on issues related to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. This year, we have gathered against the backdrop of a particularly challenging international security landscape.

Ensuring a successful outcome of the 2020 NPT Review Conference will be an overarching priority in the years to come. We must aim to make progress in all three pillars, including re-affirmation of Article VI obligations and the commitments undertaken in support of these obligations. We all have a responsibility to contribute to this end. The start of the review cycle in May was constructive. We are grateful for the excellent manner in which the
Netherlands prepared and steered our first meeting in the Preparatory Committee. A core message from this PrepCom meeting was that the NPT remains the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. This view was also clearly articulated by the Nordic countries. The very broad support for the regime based on the NPT gives us hope that Member States will focus on what unites us, rather than what divides us, so that we can make progress together.

It is strongly desirable to unite behind the NPT and practical measures to advance the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda, even though we may not agree on all issues, such as the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons. Indeed, also among the Nordic countries, the approaches to the ban treaty process have diverged.

We all share the overall objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons through reductions in nuclear arsenals based on the principles of irreversibility, verifiability and transparency. Consolidation of existing disarmament agreements such as New START and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty is therefore of greatest importance. As the New START will expire in 2021, we strongly encourage the United States and Russia to promptly initiate a dialogue on further deep reductions.

Last year, the Nordic countries were among the lead sponsors of the General Assembly resolution on nuclear disarmament verification, which was adopted by an overwhelming majority. An important step in the follow-up of this resolution will be the commencement of a Governmental Group of Experts next year.

We remain committed to further diminishing the role and significance of nuclear weapons in all military and security concepts, doctrines and policies in ways that promote international stability and security. We further call for action to reduce the operational status of nuclear weapons and the risk of accidental use. Last year, the Nordic countries were at the forefront of efforts to support a General Assembly resolution on this matter. Scientific
evidence and facts point to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons – intentional or otherwise.

The Nordic countries reiterate their firm commitment to an early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and urge all countries to uphold the no-testing norm. There is, furthermore, an urgent need to negotiate and conclude a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in order to cap any possible nuclear arms race in the future. While we need to set a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons purposes, a future Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty could also identify ways to include a phased approach to the elimination of existing stocks.

Mr Chair,

The recent nuclear and ballistic missiles test carried out by the DPRK demonstrate that we cannot take our non-proliferation gains for granted. The Nordic countries have consistently and strongly condemned these tests, which constitute a threat to the global non-proliferation regime and to international peace and security. The DPRK must comply with its international obligations and allow for the return of IAEA inspectors and the introduction of IAEA safeguards. We urge the DPRK to take the necessary steps to facilitate a diplomatic solution to this crisis.

The Iran nuclear deal shows that it is possible to achieve important results through diplomacy, even when the point of departure is difficult. Now it is essential that all parties live up to their commitments and obligations. It is also essential that the parties act in a way that builds mutual confidence, which is why Iran’s abstention from ballistic missile activity is key. This could foster progress towards a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass
destruction and their means of delivery. Such progress would require the good-faith engagement of all countries in the region.

Mr Chair,

We are today witnessing the use of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Twenty years after the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the ban against the use of chemical weapons has been violated both by the Syrian Government and by the Da’esh terrorist group. The perpetrators of such international crimes must be held accountable. We must address these serious matters with urgency, and we call for united action in the OPCW and the UN Security Council. The Nordic countries strongly support the work carried out by the OPCW Fact-Finding Missions, the Declaration Assessment Team and the Joint Investigative Mechanism. We must also make every effort to ensure full compliance with all the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. These will be crucial tasks for the new Director General of the OPCW. The Nordic countries are committed to this endeavour.

There can be no doubt that the outcome of the eighth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention was far below expectations. We missed a golden opportunity to agree on a robust inter-sessional programme of work that could enable us to improve preparedness for suspicious outbreaks, address relevant developments in life sciences, and also consider emerging challenges. We must make use of the upcoming Meeting of States Parties to take necessary corrective measures. If we fail, we run the risk of marginalising this crucial multilateral instrument.

The Nordic countries are firmly committed to the peaceful use of outer space. This year Norway and Denmark joined Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and we look
forward to making a contribution in this global forum. The Nordic countries remain ready to consider ways of reaching agreement on standards for outer space security and prevention of any future arms race in outer space. The Conference on Disarmament could provide added value in deliberating this matter.

Mr Chair,

New and rapidly evolving technologies, also in the military sphere, will have an impact on human and collective security.

One aspect that merits further consideration relates to human control over new weapons. We look forward to substantive discussions on challenges in this context, including lethal autonomous weapons systems, at the upcoming Group of Government Experts in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Armed violence using conventional weapons continues to constitute a fundamental threat to peace, security and development in a number of countries, as well some regions. It is a grave threat to human security.

The Nordic countries are firm supporters of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). It provides fundamental norms for responsible trade in conventional arms, including assessment of the potential for gender-based violence before authorising an arms export. We are also convinced that the ATT will contribute substantially to global security and stability. Terrorists rely on access to arms. The illicit arms trade is a key part of transnational organised crime, and is important for financing international terrorism and the activities of non-state armed groups. We are pleased that the ATT is gaining ground.

Small arms and light weapons kill more than half a million people each year, and the flows of illicit weapons in this category are a serious threat to security and development. We must therefore intensify efforts to combat all irresponsible and illegal trade in or use of such...
weapons, including ammunition. The UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons has made important contributions to national, regional and international security. Since its adoption in 2001, a number of steps have been taken to further enhance the relevance. We must continue these efforts, not least in the lead-up to the third review conference next year.

The Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions have established norms that go beyond their memberships. They have demonstrated the value they add to efforts to enhance human security. Engagement at the global level is crucial in order to alleviate the humanitarian consequences of cluster munitions, mines and explosive remnants of war.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Mine Ban Treaty. Since then, 51 million landmines have been destroyed, and countless civilian lives have been spared. A mine-free world by 2025 remains our ambition. Sadly, we have seen an increase in the use of improvised landmines as tools of war over the last few years. The number of civilian casualties from landmines is once again increasing.

The main challenge in the years to come will be the widespread use of homemade devices, produced and placed by non-state actors. Addressing large-scale contamination from improvised mines - and the suffering they cause - will require coordinated efforts, and dedicated resources from the international community.

Clearing the liberated areas in Iraq and Syria of all explosive remnants of war is necessary to ensure the return of internally displaced people and a return to normalcy for the population. Mine clearance is no longer something we do long after a conflict is over. It is relevant to ongoing conflicts in ways not seen before.
Mr Chair,

We would like to see many more countries participating in the ongoing discussions on how to enhance the protection of civilians in conflict, and thereby improve compliance with international humanitarian law. There is a clear obligation to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants in conflict.

We have witnessed in Syria, Yemen and Ukraine how the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas has caused a degree of civilian loss of life that is clearly disproportionate and in violation of international humanitarian law.

The destruction of critical infrastructure such as housing, schools and hospitals also makes post-conflict rehabilitation, peacebuilding and reconstruction more difficult long after the actual fighting is over.

Finally Mr Chair,

The intergovernmental disarmament machinery is at a crossroads. While the Conference on Disarmament has yet again failed to produce an agreed programme of work, some Member States seem to prefer alternative options for advancing their disarmament priorities. We take note of the remarks and suggestions put forward by the High Representative at the Conference.

Financing efforts under the various conventions and their support services is another challenge. Cases in point are the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. A first step would be that all states parties pay their dues on time, in full, and without conditions, and pay their accumulated arrears.
We need a substantive and inclusive discussion on how we can advance multilateral cooperation on disarmament and non-proliferation in order to respond to existing and emerging challenges. The preparatory process for the fourth Special Session on Disarmament (UN SSOD IV) will be a good setting for this conversation. We should engage in this conversation here in this Committee and at forthcoming events next year.

Thank you.