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STATEMENT BY

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General debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items (items 89 to 105)

on the occasion of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly,
First Committee

NEW YORK, 3 October 2017
Chairperson,

Allow me first to congratulate you on your assumption of the chair; be assured that you can count on the full support of the Netherlands’ delegation. In addition to the statement by the EU we would like to make the following remarks in our national capacity.

As the Prime Minister of the Netherlands said a few weeks ago at the UN General Assembly, ‘Every era, every decade has its problems, great and small. The problems we face now might seem overwhelming. But if you take a long-term perspective there are grounds for optimism’.

The world today is more complex, with a multitude of actors and with technological developments that often surpass our imagination. This complexity offers opportunities, such as broader stakeholder involvement, connectivity and life improving technologies, but we also see tensions on the rise in many parts of the world. Disarmament and non-proliferation efforts are indispensable to reduce tensions. Not only do they address a root cause, they also generate trust, which in itself lowers tensions.

Looking at recent events, the need for disarmament and non-proliferation efforts is clear. Last month brought a stark reminder with the sixth nuclear test conducted by the DPRK on 3 September. This test was preceded and followed by multiple ballistic missile tests. The Netherlands condemns this provocative behaviour by the DPRK in the strongest possible terms. These actions destabilize the region, are a threat to regional and global peace and security, and should therefore be ceased immediately. The regime should fully comply with its international obligations including the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. In addition, the DPRK must return to compliance with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and IAEA safeguards, and sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The Netherlands is fully committed to the goal of a world in which nuclear weapons have been permanently and irreversibly abolished. The NPT is the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime. Its full implementation requires active and joint efforts; it is the legal basis for shared commitments on disarmament, including the commitment to a nuclear-weapon free world. We might disagree on how to reach it, but it is crucial to stay focussed on our ultimate goal, which we all share.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action reinforces the viability of the rules-based non-proliferation regime created by the NPT. It underlines the value of multilateral nuclear diplomacy. The Netherlands welcomes the ongoing implementation of the agreement and calls upon all parties to continue to adhere to their commitments under the JCPOA.

The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) concluded in its third report that the Syrian regime is responsible for the use of chemical weapons in two cases it investigated. We reiterate that those responsible must be held accountable for these crimes. We stress the importance of the work of the JIM and strongly support an immediate extension of its mandate for another year sending a strong signal against impunity. The Netherlands calls upon Syria to fully comply with all its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, to cooperate fully with the OPCW and to give complete openness about the full scope of its chemical weapons programme.

The outcome of the 8th Review Conference of the Biological and Toxine Weapons Convention did not meet the Netherlands’ expectations. We hope for a better, more ambitious result in December: improving the effectiveness and scope of the treaty, reflecting current scientific developments and threats. The Netherlands contributes to this both bilaterally and
multilaterally through confidence building measures and through in kind and financial support.

Chairperson,

The international debate about the complicated subject of autonomous weapon systems is multifaceted. It is, however, crucial for future global security. We therefore regret the cancellation of the first meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. This debate should not suffer from more delays and therefore we call upon all stakeholders to actively participate in the upcoming GGE meeting in November this year.

We strongly believe that it is possible to make cluster munitions a thing of the past. We were appalled to learn that the number of victims from cluster munitions more than doubled in 2016 as compared to the year before. The Netherlands continues to condemn any use of cluster munitions by any actor.

The Netherlands is fully committed to our common goal of a mine-free world in 2025. A big challenge; we have to step up our efforts as the number of victims by landmines, including improvised devices, is on the rise and immense contamination challenges are being faced in the Middle-East caused by Da’esh. We support the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and hence our active involvement in the Convention’s machinery, in particular contributing to the individualised approach. The Netherlands has a multi-annual programme worth over 50 million euros supporting mine action in 13 countries.

With respect to the Arms Trade Treaty, there are two important challenges: (1) the effective implementation of the Treaty by its States Parties and (2) its universalization. To further increase the speed and quality of the Treaty’s implementation, the Netherlands recently contributed to the Treaty’s Voluntary Trust Fund. The Netherlands is and remains committed to the success of the Treaty and is proud to share a seat in the ATT Management Committee with Sweden.

The internet has been a key technology spurring the possibilities for innovation, economic growth and enacting our human rights. However, cyberspace is also used by both states and non-state actors to threaten international security. This development is worrisome, and to reduce the risk of escalation, the Netherlands promotes the applicability of international law, including the UN Charter in its entirety and welcomes the development of additional norms of voluntary behaviour. The failure of the UN GGE to reach agreement especially on how international law applies in cyberspace is therefore something we regret. The Netherlands urges all states to be constructive and take these discussions forward.

The prevention of an arms race in outer space is an acute problem that demands a speedy solution, as an increasing number of players are active in outer space. In the long run, there may be benefits in a treaty on PAROS. But as negotiating a treaty takes time, in the meantime we should consider voluntary guidelines which can be implemented immediately.

The Conference on Disarmament should play a pivotal role in the different disarmament discussions, many of which I just outlined. We welcome the recent substantive discussions in the Way Ahead Working Group on the core agenda items of this body, but more needs to be done. We urgently need to step up our efforts on disarmament. The current security context cannot be an excuse to sit idle. On the contrary, it should give us an even greater encouragement to do more: in a progressive or step-by-step approach.
Lastly, but certainly not least: sustainable financing is key for a sound implementation of and our universalisation efforts for the different (disarmament) Conventions. The Netherlands is seriously concerned with the financial troubles the Conventions were in, due – mainly – to structural arrears of a number of countries. It even meant that several of this year’s meetings had to be cancelled or shortened. Although there may be some light at the end of the tunnel, we are not there yet. Transparency is an important first step and we are pleased with the efforts undertaken in this regard. We will therefore continue to work with partners on (further) measures towards improving the efficiency of the contribution process, discouraging non-payment and reducing the costs of meetings. Lastly, we call upon all States that still have outstanding dues to honour their financial responsibilities expeditiously.

Chairperson,

As I said at the beginning of my statement, the problems we are facing are overwhelming. So let’s work together in addressing the challenges of today, so we will be looking ahead to a safer future for us all. We are keen to take concrete steps towards a safer world and we look forward to working together with all of you during this First Committee. Thank you.