STATEMENT
BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

DURING THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE SEVENTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Chairperson,

My delegation hereby congratulates you on your appointment as Chair of the 2017 First Committee and wishes to assure you of our full support and cooperation. We further wish to associate ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition. In the interest of time, this statement will be limited to general comments on the key issues that will be covered more extensively in our statements during the thematic debates.

Chairperson,

As we meet again for yet another First Committee Session, this platform provides us an opportunity to reflect on progress achieved during the past year. While we welcome the progress made in some areas, we are deeply aware of the daunting work that still remains in strengthening international security and disarmament in general. We remain concerned about the continuing impasse in the UN disarmament machinery. The 20-year stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament (CD) has impacted negatively on multilateralism and the multilateral system of governance.

The disarmament and international security landscape has seen progress over the last year with the adoption and opening for signature of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This is indeed an achievement and demonstrates the resolve of the international community to see the early entry into force of the Treaty. On behalf of South Africa, President Jacob Zuma signed the Treaty on the 20th of September 2017. However, there is still more that needs to be done particularly by nuclear weapon States in the area of nuclear disarmament. The argument that nuclear weapons are indispensable for the security of some States, but not for others, lacks credibility.

Chairperson,

We call upon all States Parties to the NPT to honour all their obligations and to faithfully, and without precondition, implement all commitments agreed to in 1995, 2000 and 2010, including the 1995 resolution on the establishment of a zone in the Middle East free from nuclear weapons and other weapon of mass destruction. These obligations need to be honoured. We will also endeavour to prevent the weaponisation of space as it can destroy strategic balance and stability, undermine international and national security, and disrupt existing arms control instruments.

In the area of chemical weapons, South Africa welcomes the progress made by the relevant possessor State Parties to destroy their chemical weapons stockpiles,
abandoned chemical weapons and old chemical weapons. We also commend the work of the OPCW in deploying fact-finding Missions to Syria, Iraq and all countries where alleged use of scheduled chemicals has been reported. In the area of biological weapons, South Africa is concerned that the Review Conference that took place in December of 2016 did not achieve an outcome that would strengthen the Convention and its implementation.

Chairperson,

Regarding conventional weapons, South Africa, as a State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, will play its part on the journey towards a world free of both anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. We encourage those States that have not yet done so, particularly those possessing such weapons, to join these instruments. We also call on those States in a position to do so, to assist requesting States in their national implementation efforts and to provide assistance to the victims of these weapons.

South Africa continues to believe that the UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons (UNPoA) represents the central, universally agreed set of undertakings to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. Apart from national implementation efforts, the full implementation of the entire UNPoA, including those provisions related to international co-operation and assistance, remains of critical importance. Likewise, we welcome the outcome of the Third Conference of State Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and look forward to the full implementation of the Treaty, in regulating international trade in conventional arms and in contributing towards curbing illicit transfers.

Chairperson,

My delegation stands ready to participate actively in the work of this year's First Committee and to join you and other delegations in making a success of our work.

I thank you.