Statement of the Netherlands
delivered by
H.E. Robbert Gabriëlse, Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament

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General Debate

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Chairperson,

Allow me first to congratulate you on assuming your important position. Let me also congratulate the Bureau members on the assumption of their roles. Rest assured, you can count on the full support of the delegation of the Netherlands. In addition to the statement delivered by the EU, the Netherlands would like to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

Chairperson,

[Security situation]
We see that the trends in the world today, entail serious risks to our security. We see the emergence of a multi-order world where the international balance of power is shifting, making multilateral action more difficult. We see the acceleration of technological and digital developments that are rapidly changing the field of security. Partly as a result of technological developments and a globalised world, hybrid conflicts have become a more urgent problem. This affects the internal security of countries, as the interconnection between external and internal security is getting more obvious.

[International rules-based order]
Therefore, the Netherlands believes that restoring and strengthening the foundations of our security, namely the international rules-based order and an effective multilateral system, are crucial for a secure and prosperous world. They are an anchor in the prevention of insecurity. Prevention is therefore one of the pillars on which the Netherlands’ integrated international security policy rests. Within our agenda of prevention, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation are key elements. In our vision building norms and improving the application of existing international legal frameworks on the issues related to new technologies and security, are crucial for preventing insecurity.

Defending, restoring and strengthening these foundations, this is something we have to do together, in cooperation and partnerships with other states and multiple stakeholders, including civil society. The Netherlands will therefore continue to invest in international cooperation.

Chairperson,

[NPT]
Let me now turn to our multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, of which the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the cornerstone. In today’s world, we need to focus our efforts on strengthening and implementing the NPT, with access to the benefits of peaceful nuclear applications for all. It reflects our shared goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. A goal that can be reached by pursuing a progressive approach to disarmament, where we steadily work on putting the architecture of a nuclear weapon free world in place. The Netherlands therefore continues to advocate for the immediate commencement of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty. We continue to support work on disarmament verification. We continue and to advocate the entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. We promote working on nuclear risk reduction and transparency and confidence building measures. At the same time, for this architecture to be put in place, we need to strengthen the dialogue on the current security situation and concerns on how we can improve it. We will have to redouble our efforts, as we understand the serious concerns that exist regarding the pace of implementation of all the NPT commitments. We have to create space to acknowledge our differences and find a way forward that addresses all the concerns. Only then can the NPT be fully effective. The Netherlands is ready to contribute to an analysis of the current security environment and its implications for disarmament. Let us have a frank and open mind on this without labelling this as preconditions for disarmament.

[WMDs]
Although current geopolitical realities give little cause for optimism, the Netherlands considers it a duty to continue its efforts in reaching, improving and enforcing international agreements and political-legal frameworks governing the possession, use and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Let me now go into some of today’s realities.

[JCPOA]
The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an important multilateral accomplishment under the umbrella of our global non-proliferation architecture. The Netherlands views it as vital
for international security, and hence, as an interest shared by all. In this regard, we deeply regret the withdrawal of the US. The JCPOA’s implementation should be continued. We therefore welcome the 12th report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which confirms, after robust verification and thorough monitoring, that Iran continues to uphold all its nuclear-related obligations. The Netherlands and the EU will also adhere to their commitments, as long as Iran continues to do so. In the meantime, we call upon Iran to honour the provisions on ballistic missiles of the UNSC resolution 2231, which relates to the non-proliferation of missiles and their technologies, and refrain from testing ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

[DPRK]
The DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic programme challenges our disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. Therefore, the Netherlands welcomes the efforts of the US and the Republic of Korea to achieve a nuclear weapon free Korean peninsula. Also because these efforts contribute to a reduction of tensions on the peninsula. Until the DPRK abides by its international obligations and takes concrete steps towards complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation and the abandonment of its ballistic missile programme and its other WMD programmes, sanctions should remain in place. Until then, the Netherlands, also in its capacity as chair of 1718 Sanctions Committee, urges all countries to fully implement them.

[CWC]
We remain deeply concerned with the repeated use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as with incidents in Malaysia, and most recently in the UK where chemical substances were used to assassinate individuals. Using these inhumane weapons, be it by state or non-state actors, not only violates the universal norm against the use of chemical weapons and breaches international law, it also shows a complete disregard for human decency. The Netherlands is pleased that an overwhelming majority of countries voted in favour of the decision that mandates the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. After the UN Security Council could not agree on the extension of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, this is an important signal that impunity is not an option.

[BTWC]
With regard to the Biological and Toxine Weapons Convention, the Netherlands welcomes the outcome of the Meeting of States Parties in 2017 and this year’s Meeting of Experts. The 2017 MSP provided us with the chance to strengthen the Convention, while the Meeting of Experts took a first, modest step in realising this aim. However, we believe that the international community should be more ambitious. Our aim should be to enhance the effectiveness and scope of the Convention. Current scientific developments and threats should explicitly be part of our deliberations. We now have the opportunity, so let us make the most of it.

Chairperson,

[Conventional weapons]
Turning to conventional weapons, prevention of the recurrence of conflict is key in our agenda of prevention. Therefore, human security is a starting point when dealing with the situation in the aftermath of conflict. This means creating a secure environment for people to return home. Security is in that sense a precondition for development.

[APMBC]
In this light, the Netherlands remains fully committed to achieving the goal of a mine-free world by 2025. Great progress has been made, but challenges remain, such as the increased use of mines in urban areas, which are often of an improvised nature. The Netherlands underlines the importance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and of coordination and cooperation amongst states parties.

[CCM]
We also support the efforts under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, where much progress has been made towards the clearance of contaminated areas of cluster munition remnants and stockpile destruction. However, we are not there yet. Cluster munitions continue to take lives on a
daily basis. First of all, the Netherlands condemns any use of cluster munitions by any actor. Furthermore, in terms of clearance, we need to make the Convention a truly global instrument in order to achieve a world free of cluster munitions, ultimately by 2030. We strongly encourage any state, which has not yet done so, to accede to or ratify the Convention.

[SALW]
Turning to arms trade, the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons is a growing global problem. These weapons are used in terrorist attacks within and outside Europe and exacerbate armed conflicts in Africa and the Middle East. Therefore, tackling the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons contributes significantly to a more secure society, which also is a prerequisite for sustainable development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 16. The Netherlands further welcomes the recognition of these mutually reinforcing dynamics in the outcome document of the Third Review Conference of the Programme of Action, and is committed to continue our shared efforts to ensure that disarmament and development are further integrated.

[ATT]
The Arms Trade Treaty is important for setting the international norm against irresponsible transfers of arms and to combat illicit trade. Transparency is key in achieving the objectives of the Treaty. We therefore strongly encourage States Parties to fulfil their reporting obligations. Our aims remain (1) solid implementation and (2) universalization of the Treaty. We further like to underline the continued relevance of the UN Register for Conventional Arms in the field of arms trade, as not all States are State Party to the Arms Trade Treaty. We and strongly encourage States to keep using this valuable instrument.

Chairperson,

[Emerging technologies]
High-grade technologies are becoming more advanced, cheaper and more widely available. Self-driving vehicles, robotisation, synthetic biology and artificial intelligence offer opportunities for society, but in the wrong hands, could quickly create security risks.

[Cyber]
The increasing instability in the cyber domain, as a direct consequence of destabilising cyber operations, is a threat to international peace and security. We had a year of reflection, after the GGE was not able to reach a consensus report. The suspension of the UN process created a vacuum that might give the impression of impunity to those who wish to do wrong. Therefore, multilateral cooperation is essential to deal with this cyber insecurity. The UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) found consensus in its reports of 2010, 2013, and 2015, on crucial topics with regard to: a) the application of international law, b) recommendations for voluntary, non-binding standards of behaviour, c) capacity building and 4) confidence building measures. We believe it is high time to resume our expert meetings and to go back to consensual decision-making. It is of utmost importance that the group will both focus on implementing and strengthening the normative framework that the UN GGE process has already carefully built. If we fail to do so, we risk weakening the international legal order in cyberspace that we need so dearly, as recent events have illustrated again.

We need to take the recommendations of the previous successful GGE’s into account and to promote their implementation. We support establishing another expert working group, working on the basis of consensus, to look into the issues at stake. We should look for a format that includes the UN members currently not present in the debate and the ideas of other stakeholders as well. Only then will we succeed in addressing our pressing cyber security issues.

[LAWS]
The Netherlands welcomes the progress made during the 2018 meetings of the GGE on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, in particular the adoption of ten guiding principles. The topic is multifaceted and complex, which is exactly why multilateral discussions on this topic are needed,
in order to arrive at a better understanding and to contribute to norm building. The Netherlands is, as before, ready to contribute to these discussions.

[Promoting the international rules-based order]
As part of promoting the international rules-based order, the Netherlands supports efforts to strengthen the effectiveness and legitimacy of multilateral organisations and international institutions.

[UNSG Disarmament Agenda]
In this light, we welcome the recent launch of the UN Secretary-General’s Agenda for Disarmament: Securing our Common Future, in which he acknowledges that ‘disarmament and arms control have played a critical role in preventing and ending crises and armed conflict’. The UN plays an important role in this field, and the Netherlands believes that the UNSG’s Agenda for Disarmament will contribute to these common efforts. Furthermore, the Agenda integrates disarmament into the priorities of the whole UN system, encouraging the breakdown of the silos between related policy areas. The Netherlands strongly believes in an integrated approach, which is at the heart of its own security policy.

[Disarmament Machinery]
For multilateral disarmament, the Conference on Disarmament is our starting point, with its unique membership and clear mandate to negotiate disarmament instruments. The Netherlands is encouraged by the substantive work conducted in the subsidiary bodies of the CD, established this year. For the first time in 22 years, we adopted substantive reports. We should build on this positive development and continue our substantive work with a view to start negotiations.

Concerning the financial situation of some Geneva-based Conventions, we are seriously concerned with the structural arrears of contributions and problems related to financial liquidity. These hamper the proper functioning of these Conventions. We therefore urge all States Parties to those Conventions, and those States participating in the meetings, to meet their financial obligations in full and on time.

[Conclusion]
As I said at the beginning of my statement, we are confronted with serious risks to our security. We cannot tackle these issues on our own. Together, we must strengthen and defend our institutions, our multilateral system and ultimately, our international rules-based order. We look forward to working with you during the First Committee.

Thank you, Chairperson.