Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairman of this Committee. I assure you of my delegation’s full cooperation.

Portugal fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to make complementary comments in its national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

In the present climate of growing mistrust effective multilateralism, real cooperation and willingness to reach consensus are, more than ever, the way forward. The role of the UN and the existing rules-based multilateral system should be, and needs to be, strengthened.

The efforts of the Secretary-General to reinforce synergies across the UN system with the aim to maximize progress towards peace, security, sustainable development and human rights are welcomed. As the initial implementation plan for the Disarmament Agenda was launched, we respond positively to the SG’s call for action.
Mr. Chairman,

Portugal remains fully committed to nuclear disarmament. The well-documented catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons should reinforce our commitment to a world free of nuclear weapons. It is a moral imperative.

My country shares most of the concerns and frustration about the lack of concrete steps on nuclear disarmament, that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. But, in our view, a process of gradual reduction of nuclear weapons, taking into account legitimate national and international security concerns, continues to be the best approach to ensure sustainable progress in multilateral disarmament negotiations.

This inclusive step-by-step approach has been driving progress towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons since the Cold War. But the gains made may be at risk, as we are witnessing a rise in global and regional tensions and growing signs of a new arms race, in both strategic and conventional weapons.

The threat of nuclear proliferation remains a serious cause for concern. For Portugal, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the cornerstone of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, the foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and an important element in the future development of nuclear energy peaceful applications. We hope that the ongoing review cycle will result in a more robust and effective Treaty. Portugal will undertake every effort to achieve a substantial outcome at the 2020 NPT Review Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

Portugal supports the essential role of the OPCW, in ensuring global chemical security and addressing evolving challenges. We
believe that the upcoming Fourth Review Conference presents an opportunity, not to be missed, to ensure full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The international community should work together to restore the norm against chemical weapons. The confirmed use of chemical weapons in different parts of the world, including Europe, in recent years is totally unacceptable and those responsible must be held accountable. It was in this spirit that Portugal has sponsored the Decision adopted by the OPCW Conference of States Parties last June.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite the current worrisome trends, there are also some signs of hope.

Recent diplomatic efforts in the Korean Peninsula are welcomed and must be encouraged. The inter-Korean dialogue and the talks between the USA and the DPRK should lead to the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Until then, Security Council Resolutions must be fully implemented and we urge the DPRK to comply with the NPT and IAEA safeguards, and to sign and ratify the CTBT.

One year after the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the majority of Member States continue to support the agreement. As confirmed by the IAEA, the deal has been serving its purposes. Therefore we strongly encourage its implementation by all parties.

Although some of these developments are encouraging, we need to redouble our efforts to build confidence and reverse negative trends.

The early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) should be a top priority. We call upon all States,
particularly the remaining Annex 2 States, to sign and ratify the Treaty. Portugal has been actively involved in the efforts to promote the universalization of the CTBT and welcomes Thailand’s recent ratification of the Treaty, becoming its 167th ratifying State.

There is also an urgent need to start negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) and achieve progress on nuclear disarmament verification.

The International Community must continue to seek the establishment of a Middle East Free Zone of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction. We must remain seized of the implementation of the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, guided by the Action Plan of the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

Mr. Chairman,

The disarmament machinery is another area where we could and should do more.

The Conference on Disarmament remains closed to the admission of new States, like mine, which throughout the years reaffirmed their interest in becoming full Parties to the Conference. Portugal, once again, urges all States to address the issue of membership of the CD as a decisive step towards its renewal.

On the UNDC, we were encouraged by the adoption, at last year’s session, of recommendations on conventional arms. For the current cycle of our deliberations, we must build on that success and work together to reach consensus on the adoption of recommendations on the two Working Groups.

Turning to conventional weapons,
Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are the more widespread instruments of violence and death. We welcome the Outcome Document adopted in June at the UNPoA RevCon, stressing the importance of the PoA for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and recognizing the gender dimension. Regretfully, there was no consensus on the inclusion of ammunition in the scope of the Programme.

The Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has the potential to be a very effective instrument against the illicit trade of conventional arms and ammunition, especially to regions in conflict and to countries with high levels of armed violence. Portugal urges all States that have not yet done so to join the Treaty.

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention is an example of success. Despite the remarkable progress already achieved, we are still far from attaining the objective of an anti-personnel mine free world by 2025. Portugal calls upon every State to support and promote the universalization and implementation of the Convention and the Maputo Action Plan.

Mr. Chairman,

On new and emerging threats, such as armed drones, autonomous weapons, cyberspace and militarization of outer space, we should encourage transparency and adapt applicable international law or develop new regulatory multilateral security frameworks responsive to the objective of protecting civilians and Human Rights.

To conclude,

I would like to reaffirm Portugal's firm belief in the merits of effective multilateralism - with the UN at its core and anchored in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights - in all disarmament and non-proliferation discussions and initiatives.
Our expectation is that the work of this Committee, by enhancing dialogue, would contribute to build trust and narrow our differences, enabling us to make progress on the disarmament agenda.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.