Chairperson,

South Africa associates itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the African Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the New Agenda Coalition.

As we celebrate the centenary year of Nelson Mandela, it is our view that his resounding call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons should reinvigorate our common resolve and commitment towards the realisation of a world free of nuclear weapons. South Africa remains steadfast in its conviction that nuclear weapons do not guarantee security, but detract from it. As long as these weapons exist, and vertical and horizontal proliferation persists, the world will continue to face the threat of annihilation. Since the impact of a nuclear weapons detonation - including the long term humanitarian, environmental and socio-economic consequences - cannot be constrained in space and time, nuclear weapons cannot be treated only as a matter of national security concern for the few States that still possess such weapons. By their very nature, nuclear weapons threaten the security of us all – it is a threat to our collective security. All States therefore have a legitimate stake in, and responsibility for, nuclear disarmament.

Chairperson,

In the above regard, we remain concerned that little concrete progress has been achieved in the area of nuclear disarmament since 2010. Whilst reductions are important, they do not substitute for concrete, transparent, irreversible and verifiable nuclear disarmament measures. On-going modernisation programmes, including in relation to delivery systems, make it clear that some States still wish to indefinitely retain these instruments of destruction, contrary to their legal obligations and political commitments. This undermines the NPT bargain and also the non-proliferation norms established by the Treaty in particular, Article VI that makes it clear that nuclear disarmament is an obligation of all States Parties.

In this context, South Africa joins the majority of States in welcoming the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and believes that it represents one of the most significant developments in the area of nuclear weapons since 1945. We are pleased that National efforts have progressed to an advanced stage to ratify the Treaty, as per our Constitutional requirements. Furthermore we congratulate the countries that signed and ratified the Treaty on the Commemoration of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on 26 September 2018 and we wish to encourage States that have not done so, to please sign and ratify the TPNW as soon as possible.

The TPNW as well as Article IV of the NPT guarantees the inalienable right of all the State Parties to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of the Treaty. This Article is of particular relevance and importance to
Africa, given the need for adequate energy supplies to fuel sustainable and accelerated economic growth on our Continent. South Africa's approach to nuclear energy is premised on the fact that peaceful nuclear cooperation and access to the benefits of nuclear energy, pursuant to this Article, are integral components of the Treaty. Many countries are increasingly recognising nuclear energy as a viable, reliable and clean option to meet their growing energy demands. In this context, South Africa is working towards ensuring energy security that promotes economic growth and sustainable development and mitigates our carbon footprint, hence nuclear energy has been identified as part of our energy mix to address energy security in the country. We remain committed to maximising the benefits that nuclear energy holds for the socio-economic well-being of our citizens, while ensuring that these technologies are not diverted or abused for non-peaceful activities.

Chairperson,

Having concluded the Second PrepCom of the 2020 NPT Review Cycle earlier this year, we attach great importance to the continued validity of the outcomes of the 1995, 2000 and 2010 Review Conferences, as well as the extensive Action Plan aimed at accelerating the implementation of all Treaty provisions under the three Treaty pillars. However, urgent action is required to fully implement the commitments and undertakings entered into at these Review Conferences. South Africa believes that concrete progress on these solemn undertakings is essential to the success of the 2020 review cycle. Furthermore, we continue to believe that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) constitutes an important disarmament and non-proliferation measure and therefore support the establishment of new zones, including in the Middle East. In this regard, it is our hope that the voting patterns on resolutions dealing with the implementation of existing commitments would reflect the political will of States to preserve the credibility of the NPT.

To conclude, Chairperson, let me reiterate that nuclear weapons have no place in today's security environment. Instead of deterring conflict and war, as some continue to allege, these weapons remain a constant source of insecurity and a driver of proliferation. The enormous amount of public resources directed at the production and maintenance of nuclear weapons remains in sharp contrast to those channelled towards socio-economic development, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Today, the costs related to the maintenance of nuclear arsenals amount to approximately more than double the development assistance provided to Africa. This is neither justifiable nor sustainable in a world where the basic human needs of billions have yet to be met.

Chairperson,

It is our view that nuclear disarmament is clearly not only a legal obligation, but also a moral and ethical imperative. In this regard, my delegation has the honour to again table for consideration a resolution entitled "Ethical Imperatives for a world without nuclear weapons" which we hope will receive wide support. I thank you.